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THE HAND OF THE SPOILER



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GUTTER TRAGEDIES
CHILDREN OF EARTH
THE FOLLY OF THE WISE
THE MOTOR PIRATE
THE CRUISE OF THE CONQUISTADOR
THE LADY OF THE BLUE MOTOR

THE HAND OF THE SPOILER

BY

G. SIDNEY PATERNOSTER

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CHAPTER I

Let them get who have the power,
And let them keep who can.

THE night was of velvety blackness—one of those soft, warm, dark nights of June when the south-west wind rolls a cloud-curtain over the stars, when the air is heavy with unshed rain, when lamps burn dully, and when a nameless oppression broods over the face of the land.

Seated at an open casement, looking out into the London night, was a woman. Her hands grasped each other over her knee with a tense grip which gave the lie to the calm of her face. Hers was a face to which in repose Rossetti would have woven an adoring sonnet, though not as to another "lazy, laughing, languid Jenny, fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea," but a sonnet to purity and peace. Yet if the sonnet had been written and the woman had read, the full scarlet lips, which seemed to have gathered into them all the colour from her face, would have parted in scornful laughter.

Her eyes, a part of the night into which they gazed, had dull shadows beneath them, painted there by

weariness, yet she still sat motionless in a strained attitude of expectation.

Her sole companion, seated a few yards away in an easy chair, looked up at her occasionally from a book which he held in his hand and smiled.

Lynton Hora, the Commendatore, as he chose to be called by the members of his household, was in quite another way an equally interesting type of humanity. He was a man of seventy inches, broad-shouldered and lean-flanked, with well-poised head. His hair was grey at the sides, his face was clean-shaven. Seen lounging in the easy chair, with his face in the shadow, he appeared to be a man of not more than forty—an old-young student, perhaps, for there were thought lines in his brow and his cheeks were almost as pallid as those of the woman at the window. Such an impression would, however, have been speedily put to flight immediately he looked up. Then there could be no mistaking the man of action. The keen hard grey eyes, the domineering nose, the firmly-cut lips labelled him definitely—conclusively.

Presently the woman altered her position. The in-drawing of her breath as she turned from the window might have been a sigh. She looked round at her companion.

He seemed conscious of the movement, as, without lifting his eyes, he remarked lazily, "Tired, Myra?"

She strove to reproduce the quietude of his tone

as she remarked, "A little. What's the time now, Commendatore?" But there was a tremor in her voice which showed clearly that she was not so indifferent as she wished to appear.

The man tossed down his book.

"Listen!" he said.

Almost as if in answer to his summons the voice of Big Ben floated softly in through the window—one, two.

"He ought to be back by now," she said, and, rising, she began to rearrange the roses in a bowl on a table near.

"I don't expect Guy for another hour at least," said the man carelessly, though he watched the woman keenly as he spoke. "After that—well, if we don't see him in an hour we shall probably not see him for five years at least."

The woman winced as from a blow.

"Five—or seven? It won't matter much, will it?" she replied quietly. Then in a moment her self-control dropped from her. Her lethargy vanished. A light came into her eyes, her nostrils became vibrant. Without alteration of pitch her voice became passionate. "It is horrible—brutal of you to send him on such a business. What can possess you to do such a thing? Can you not spare even——"

"Hush!" The man's voice interrupted her. He spoke with silken suavity. "How often have I not told you that the reiteration of facts known to both

parties to a conversation is the hall-mark of the unintelligent?

"By Jove, Myra," he said, changing the subject, "how really beautiful you are! What a lucky dog Guy is to rouse such interest."

The woman dropped her eyes and the man continued meditatively, "What a vast alteration has taken place in the ideal of feminine beauty since the fifteenth century. Do you know, Myra, while you have been sitting so patiently at the window I have been measuring you by the canons of beauty laid down by that sleek old Churchman, Messer Agnolo Firenzuola"—he tapped the black-letter volume which lay beside him—"and though he, I'm afraid, would have had many faults to find with your features——"

The levity of his tone roused her again to passionate utterance. "No more!" she cried. "Have you no heart left in you, Commendatore, that you can send your own son to such danger and sit there calmly reading while——" She broke off abruptly, her voice choked with a sob.

Lynton Hora rose from his seat and viewed the woman, who shrank from his gaze.

"Have matters gone so far as that?" he asked, and his lips smiled cynically.

She made no reply.

"You never asked my permission," he continued dispassionately. "Guy has said nothing. I am

afraid, Myra, I shall have to see that he is protected from your influence."

She looked at him appealingly, and her eyes were as the night, heavy with unshed rain.

"He—is—your—son," she said slowly. "I—I cannot do him the harm that you can do him—and yet, I am afraid for him. Perhaps you had better send me away, Commendatore. My fears may make a coward of him."

The man spoke as if musing aloud. "Where shall I send you? Back to the gutter from whence I picked you? Do you remember anything of your home, Myra?"

"I know, I know," she protested. "You have reminded me often enough."

He paid no heed to her appeal.

"Yesterday," he said, "I visited the place. No, it has not tumbled down yet, my dear. I visited the very house where your mother sold you to me for half a crown and a bottle of gin, a dirty child of five. That was fifteen years ago—fifteen years ago to-day. You were unwanted, uncared for; I wanted you, I cared for you. Let me tell you how I found your mother, Myra." She lifted her hands with a gesture of appeal. He disregarded the action. "She occupies the same old room. There's but little light finds its way through the dirty window, but enough to show that your mother has not changed her habits—nor her rags. She sat there alone, like a dropsical spider,

and cried aloud for gin. Would you like to change this "—his hand directed attention to the apartment —" for a share of your mother's abode, Myra Norton ? "

Myra had seated herself. She made no answer for a while. Her eyes wandered about the long apartment, with its shaded lights and its flowers and its luxurious furniture. Her hand dropped on the silken gauze of her dress. The man watching smiled as he saw the flash of the diamonds on her fingers and noted the caressing motion of her fingers upon the shimmering fabric. At last she raised her eyes to her questioner.

" You could not send me back," she said.

"I could send you to a worse place," he replied coldly. " You know my power."

She shuddered.

His tone changed completely.

" You little fool," he said roughly, but with a kindliness it had lacked hitherto. " You know very well that I could never let you go back to the stews from which I rescued you. But I wanted to remind you, Myra, that you belong to me ; that, like myself, you are pledged to war—a merciless, devouring, devastating war with society ; that you, even as myself, are outcast—one from whom the world would shrink. You have been in danger of forgetting lately, Myra."

" I have not forgotten," she answered, with comparative quietness, " but I have been thinking of what is the use of it all, this eternal warfare against the world. You have won again and again. You

have told me that you are the richer by what the world has lost. You need lack nothing that money may buy. There must come a time when the warrior must rest."

"Not while his arm retains its strength to lift his sword," replied Hora, "and by that time he should have provided some one to take his place."

"But if that person is unequal to the task?" Myra queried timidly.

"He pays the penalty," answered Hora.

"Even if he is your own son?" she persisted.

"Or your lover," he added coldly.

"Your heart is iron," she murmured despairingly.

He laughed aloud. "Or non-existent," he said. "It was stolen from me years ago, and I have forgotten what it was like to be possessed of one. Now I have only my profession, and in that I am first. You admit that, Myra?"

"I admit that," she replied sullenly.

"Why should I not train my successor to take my place when my day comes?"

The woman in the listener cried out instinctively, "Because he has what you lack—a heart."

He smiled grimly. "It is easily lost, Myra. What if I should say to you some day, Take it from him, toss it away, trample on it, break it, or store it away and treasure it with your trinkets—do as you like with it?"

"You would——" She rose from her seat and

faced him with extended arms. Her lips were slightly parted. The shadows had flitted away from her eyes. Her bosom rose stormily from its gauze veilings. Her lithe form was poised expectantly.

"By Jove, you are beautiful, Myra!" he answered.

"I am glad of it—glad," she cried exultantly.

Hora stood in a thoughtful attitude.

"Myra—Myrrha," he said, turning the name about; "a good name for a love potion; there's a foreshadowing of the bitterness of love in it."

Her brow clouded and she turned away. "You are always mocking me," she muttered.

"No," he said, and he stepped across the room to her side. There was something strange about his walk. He passed across the room with the swift, stealthy swing of a panther—a wounded panther, for one foot dragged after the other and robbed his progress of complete grace. He came to her side and laid his hand on her arm.

"I am not mocking to-night, Myra," he said seriously. "I have long wanted to know exactly where Guy was placed in your thoughts. You have never revealed yourself until to-night. Even now I am not quite sure——"

Myra's countenance cleared and a happy smile shone on her face. She looked up at him expectantly.

"You can tell me how much you care for him," he continued. "I shall not reveal your confidence to Guy."

She dropped her eyes.

"I cannot tell any one," she whispered, with a strange shyness.

Hora smiled whimsically. "What liars love makes of us all," he said. "Yet perhaps you are speaking truthfully. You cannot tell me what you do not know."

"I could die—die happily—for him," she murmured softly.

"Fools sometimes die for utter strangers," remarked Hora sardonically. "That's not love. Could you live for him? Could you give yourself to another for his welfare? Could you——"

"Not that—no, not that!" The cry was wrung from her lips. "You would not condemn me to that, Commendatore?"

"Hush, Myra!" he said. "I was merely speaking of possibilities which might arise in the future."

"I thought," she faltered, "that some scheme had crossed your brain, which would necessitate—I could not do it now."

"I have thought of no scheme," he replied reassuringly, "which would wither this new flower which has blossomed in your heart."

"You are mocking again," she remarked.

"I am speaking seriously," he retorted, "of possibilities which might occur. Guy's mate must be prepared for anything—for everything. You must remember that I am not to be turned aside from the

object I have in view. Nor is Guy to be turned aside either. His will is as inflexible as mine. The woman who mates with him must be at one with him in his purpose, and if need be must be ready to sacrifice herself. Tell me now, Myra, if you can do that, or must I find a mate for him who will ? "

She did not hesitate a moment. The blood rushed to her face. " For Guy I would do anything," she cried. " All that I ask is to be near him, to help him, to——"

" To weaken him with your woman's fears," Hora interpolated.

" No ! " she cried. " He would never know that I feared for his safety. Let me try, Commendatore. Give me a fair chance—only that."

He meditated awhile, then he tapped Myra's arm with his finger.

" You shall have your chance," he said. " But remember it is your business to keep him to his profession. He has no time for love-making. You shall have your chance, but be sure you use it wisely. If you do the day may come when I shall say to Guy, there is your wife—and the wife will be the child I have picked from the gutter and educated and treated as my own."

There was a brooding menace in the tone in which he finished, and the woman feared to waken him to speech again. At last he said harshly—

" Have you no thanks, Myra ? "

"You frighten me sometimes, Commendatore," she answered timidly; "I cannot understand you."

"You will do so some day," he replied. He seemed amused at the idea, for he laughed and spoke good-humouredly. "If you make good use of your chances, my girl, everything will become clear to you. You have wit as well as beauty, Myra. Make use of them both. He is of an age to be caught."

Through the open window the voice of Big Ben solemnly tolled three.

The light died out of the woman's face. "Cruel!" she murmured in a tense, hoarse whisper. "It was cruel to mock me so. Something has happened to him. The hour has passed. Oh, Guy, Guy!"

Lynton Hora turned upon her fiercely. "Is this a specimen of your self-control?" he said. "Haven't you learned that in the profession Guy has adopted a thousand trivial events may supply reason for delay. Mind, if I have any snivelling I withdraw my promise."

Myra was constrained into silence. She went to the window. Already the black night had given place to the grey mists of coming dawn. She looked out over the park. Out of the sea of shadows objects began to emerge. From the near distance the music of violins and harps throbbed to a waltz measure. She stood there unheeding while the light strengthened, and the dawn came up from the east in a glory of crimson and gold. She stood there unseeing, her

heart throbbing with agony, yet with face schooled to complete apathy.

The rose and the gold faded from the sky. Another day had begun. She had forgotten Hora's presence, forgotten everything. She closed the window and lifted her hand to pull down the blinds and shut out the day. Hora's voice awakened her.

"Listen!" he said, and, rising swiftly from his chair, he pushed Myra aside and threw open the casement again. The sharp sound of the bell of an electric brougham entered that window on the eighth storey and the voice of Big Ben striking four.

"Only somebody's brougham," said Myra listlessly.

"My brougham," replied Hora curtly; "bringing Guy home."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Coming back without him, most likely," she said. Still, in spite of the remark, hope showed itself in her expression. The carriage stopped. For five minutes a strained silence endured. It was broken by the sound of an outside door opening and shutting. Another pause. Both were looking towards the door of the apartment in which Myra and Hora both stood. Hora held up his finger warningly to his companion.

The door opened and there entered a young man in evening clothes; his coat was over his arm, upon which an umbrella was hooked, and his hat was in his hand.

"Hullo! I didn't expect any one to be waiting up

for me," he remarked cheerfully. "I thought that was a privilege reserved for the reprobate sons of evangelical households. I suppose you haven't been praying for the success of my undertaking."

He laughed joyously. His high spirits seemed infectious. Hora smiled responsively. Joy illuminated Myra's expressive features like sunlight on the woodlands after an April shower.

"You surely did not think that I should fail?" he asked, looking from one to another.

"I did not," replied Hora drily. "Myra scarcely shared my confidence, though. She seemed to think that it was brutal of me to give you a chance of showing what you could do when working on your own account." The young man laughed again.

"These women—these women," he said. Then he turned to Myra. "I thought that you at least would have had confidence in me." He tossed his coat on to a chair, and going to her encircled her waist with his arm. "Did you really think I should fail in my first coup?" he asked.

"No—no—no!" she cried vehemently. "But, oh, Guy! I was afraid. If I could only have come with you—to have shared in the danger."

"Then I probably should have failed," he added. "As it is——"

He turned to Hora, and there was a proud gleam in his eyes. "You must set me a more difficult task next time, Commendatore," he said.

"Then you have secured the picture?" asked the elder man eagerly.

For reply Guy lifted the umbrella from the table where he had laid it down. To all appearance it was merely a rather bulky specimen of the article it pretended to be, but in the young man's hands the handle unscrewed, revealing the fact that it was a sham. Instead of an umbrella, a long narrow case was revealed, and from within it Guy coaxed with infinite care a roll of canvas.

"It was rather a tight fit," he remarked, "but I don't think I have damaged the picture." He unrolled the canvas carefully on the table.

Hora's eyes sparkled as he looked down upon the painting.

"How I have longed for a genuine Greuze to add to my collection," he remarked, "and this—this is the most perfect specimen in the world. My dear Guy, how can I ever be grateful enough to you?"

Was there a dash of sarcasm in his voice? If so, the young man did not notice it. He was moved to genuine emotion.

"It is a little thing in return for all you have done for me," he replied earnestly. He laid his hand on the elder man's arm as he continued. "There's nothing I would not do which would add to your happiness—you have given me so much."

Hora shook off the grasp.

"The air is overcharged with sentiment," he said

lightly. "Myra here might have been trained in an English boarding-school for young ladies, she is so full of it—and now you——"

He held up his hands in derision.

Guy laughed gaily. He was used to Hora's moods.

"Sentiment does sound a little incongruous from the lips of a successful burglar, doesn't it?" he said, and he laughed again at the whimsicality of the idea. "Yet you know that at heart, Commendatore, you are just as much of a sentimentalist as either Myra or myself. What else can be the motive for your perpetual enmity with the world?"

"What else—aye, what else?" murmured Hora musingly, a bitter smile about his lips. "But all the same, there's no need to debauch our minds with big draughts of sentiment neat. It's dangerous."

He returned to contemplation of the picture.

"The fool who owned this," he said, "would have sold it. He's really no poorer because it has passed from his possession. It is not the loss of the work of art that he will regret, but the loss of the ten thousand guineas he gave for it."

"It is in really appreciative hands now," remarked Guy after a pause. "By the way," he added, picking up his overcoat from the chair, "I could not resist the temptation of bringing away a few of the best examples of Flurscheim's snuff-boxes. I know you have a vacant corner or two in the cabinets upstairs, and if you think they are not worthy of being placed in them,

well, the brilliants in the settings will make a necklace for Myra."

He thrust his hand into the pockets and took out a number of superb specimens of the art of a bygone age.

"It was very thoughtful of you," said Hora, lifting each box lovingly as Guy laid it on the table. There were twelve in all, and eight he placed on one side. "These are really artistic productions," he said, "and I shall keep them. The others are worth no more than the intrinsic value of the stones and the gold of which they are made."

Guy turned to Myra. "What will you have them made into, Myra—a necklet or a bracelet? I must give you a keepsake to wear in memory of my first big exploit."

"Anything you like, Guy," she answered softly, while her face flushed with delight.

"Then we will think of something," he said carelessly. He picked up one of the boxes which Hora had placed aside. "I think I should like to keep this one myself, Commendatore," he remarked, "as a souvenir of the occasion."

Hora took it from his hand and looked at the box curiously. In the lid was set an exquisite miniature on ivory of a young girl, with regular, delicate features and a cloud of golden hair.

"You have good taste—keep it by all means," said Hora carelessly. A slight hesitation in Guy's tone

as he proffered the request was evidence to his swift brain that the young man had not revealed the whole of his reason for the desire to retain that particular box. He knew that he could when he liked elicit that reason. But the morning was growing old. He began to feel wearied. He would have plenty of time on the morrow to learn all that he desired to know.

"Come, my children," he said, "it is time we went to bed. Guy, you will help me put these new possessions of ours into the place of security. Sleep well, Myra."

The woman accepted the dismissal submissively. She re-echoed the wish, and with a last glance over her shoulder at Guy as she swept out of the room she left them.

"Myra's getting very fond of you, Guy," remarked Hora when the door had closed behind her.

"Indeed!" he answered carelessly, for his mind was running on other matters.

Hora laughed at the tone, but he did not renew the subject.

"What made you so late?" he asked.

"Some jolly people I met at the ball," he answered absently. "I stopped an hour longer than I intended."

"H'm, business before pleasure is as good a motto for your profession as for any other," said Hora.

"I know," answered Guy; "but still——"

"You are young," commented Hora. "I hope that in your haste you left no clue."

The young man laughed. "Plenty," he said, "but all false ones."

"Well, you shall tell me all about it in the morning," said Hora. "Bring the stuff along."

Guy gathered up the sham umbrella and the jewelled snuff-boxes, slipping the one he had decided to retain for himself into his pocket.

Hora raised the picture reverently and led the way out of the room, Guy following him.

CHAPTER II

CONCERNING THE GREUZE, SOME GENTILES, AND A JEW

LATER on that same morning all London was thrilled by the story of a sensational burglary at the house of Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim, the noted connoisseur and dealer in objects of art.

Just at daybreak Mr. Flurscheim had been aroused by the ringing of the burglar alarm, and, throwing on his dressing-gown, he had rushed downstairs. There he had found the front door open, and, running into the street, he commenced to blow frantically the police whistle which he had in his hand—he always slept with a police whistle attached to a ribbon round his neck and with a revolver under his pillow.

He had not been compelled to waste much breath before the summons was responded to, for a constable was almost instantly on the spot.

Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim dwelt in a quarter of London greatly favoured by rank, fashion, and the children of Abraham. His house was at the corner of a street turning into Park Lane, and at the shrill sound of the whistle there emerged from turning after turning helmeted men in blue, who with one accord

made their way at paces varying with each man's temperament to the place where the excited art-dealer stood beckoning vigorously.

Mr. Flurscheim had speedily revealed his reason for giving the alarm. The house was surrounded by constables, and two of the force accompanied the owner back into his house, which they proceeded to search systematically. At this time Mr. Flurscheim had not discovered his loss, and was disposed to think that the electric alarm had frustrated an attempt of some one to enter his abode. But when he arrived, in the course of the search, at his drawing-room on the first floor he learned that the thief had been only too successful in the object which had brought him thither. From the place on the wall where the gem of his collection—the Greuze, which he had sworn should never leave his possession until £20,000 should have been paid into his banking account—had hung, only an empty frame confronted him, while tossed carelessly aside on the table was an ordinary table-knife, which had been used for the purpose of cutting the canvas from the frame.

Upon the discovery of his loss Mr. Flurscheim had for a while been bereft of speech and movement. When volition returned to him he behaved as one demented. He wrung his hands, he tore his hair and his clothes, and he called upon the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to visit his despoiler with condign punishment.

When, a little later, he discovered that some more of his choicest treasures—the jewelled snuff-boxes of which he had the finest collection in the world—had been carried away, he became absolutely frantic with grief, so that even the policemen felt moved in their hearts to pity him.

The frenzy did not endure long. A thing trifling in itself was sufficient to restore the dealer to full possession of his senses. The sergeant of police, who had accompanied him into the room, had pulled out his notebook in readiness to make notes of the occurrence when a clock on the mantelshelf struck four. At the sound Flurscheim became still.

"Four o'clock," he murmured. "Four o'clock. There's no time to lose. We must be doing." He turned to the policeman. "Sergeant," he said dejectedly, "I shall trust you to forget the exhibition I have made of myself—I——"

The sergeant answered briskly, "Very natural, I'm sure, sir. Should have felt just like it myself, though I must admit I've put the bracelets on many a man who hasn't said half as much as you have done—of course in the public streets, sir."

There was a sickly smile on Flurscheim's face as he answered, "I hope none of them had such good reason for cursing as I have."

He did not pursue the topic. With an effort he forced his mind from contemplation of the loss. "Hadn't we better leave things in this room untouched

while we search the rest of the house. There may be some one of the burglars, if there was more than one, still on the premises."

The sergeant agreed; but the search was a fruitless one. Mr. Flurscheim's butler and his four women-servants were the only other persons found on the premises, and after their unsuccessful search the uniformed members of the force withdrew and the dealer sat down to await the arrival of the detective with what patience he could summon to his aid.

It was the bitterest moment in Flurscheim's career. Despite Lynton Hora's sneer it was not the monetary value of his loss which troubled him, for though he dealt in pictures and other art objects yet he never parted with any of his treasures without a poignant feeling of regret. When he sold them, however, he knew that they would pass into appreciative hands, that they would be guarded carefully and preserved jealously. To him they were what horses are to one man or dogs to another. They were his companions, his friends, his children. To have the most prized of them ruthlessly cut from its frame and carried away, he knew not where, was as if his household had been robbed of an only child.

He gazed forlornly at the empty frame. Since the Greuze had come into his possession never a night had passed without his taking a last glance at it before going upstairs to bed, never a morning dawned but that he had feasted his eyes upon it before sitting down

to his breakfast. To live alone without the Greuze seemed to him an unthinkable existence.

Yet the frame was empty. There took root in his heart a desire for revenge upon the man who had robbed him.

That thought matured in the days which followed—the days which came swiftly and passed swiftly, but without bringing him any trace of his treasure; days in which the detectives continually buoyed him up with hopes that his picture was on the ace of being restored to him.

They had indeed thought that the task would not prove a difficult one. Their inspection of the room from which the picture had been stolen had led to the discovery of a number of clues to work upon. They discovered that an entry must have been effected through a window which opened upon the portico over the front door. At that window were a number of scarlet-berried shrubs, and some of the berries were found crushed on the carpet inside. On the balcony they discovered a palette-knife with smears of cobalt and chrome upon it, which obviously had been used to force back the catch of the window. For days afterwards detectives might have been discovered knocking at the doors of London studios and offering themselves as models to aspiring academicians, in the hope of discovering the missing picture; but they found no trace of the Greuze.

On the knife-handle, too, were unmistakable finger-

prints, and on the empty frame were others. All were photographed, and hope was strong that the identity of the thief would be disclosed thereby, through comparison with the records of convicts at Scotland Yard. But when the first comparison seemed to point to the fact that every print was that of a different person, and closer investigation proved that the dirty smudges were not finger-prints at all, the problem became indubitably more complex. As for the knife which had been used to cut the canvas from the frame, that was an ordinary table-knife, of which counterparts might have been discovered in every mean house in the metropolis, and supplied no basis for any theory as to the owner. The one fact which chiefly puzzled Scotland Yard, however, was the fact that no suspicious characters had been observed anywhere in the neighbourhood, while the position of the house was such that it was particularly open to observation.

Standing at the corner of two streets, in a neighbourhood where all the houses would be described in a house-agent's catalogue as highly desirable family town residences, it was under observation from at least three quarters. The streets at three or four o'clock were at that time practically empty of all pedestrians save the police, yet not a member of the police on duty in the vicinity had seen a suspicious-looking character. This was the more astonishing because two extra constables were on duty that night

in the near neighbourhood. They had been detailed for duty at the town mansion of one of the most popular of society hostesses, Lady Greyston, who was giving the first of her dances for the season. Lady Greyston's house was only six removed from Mr. Flurscheim's, and until three o'clock one of the constables had been stationed at the corner of the street, and practically at Mr. Flurscheim's front door, in order to direct the carriages arriving to pick up departing guests. The stream of carriages had thinned shortly after three, and then the constable had joined a colleague at the door of Lady Greyston's house, but at no time during the night had anything out of the way attracted his attention. The police were quite at a loss for an object for suspicion.

But while Scotland Yard was hopelessly bewildered by the absence of a clue, the newspapers had been busily printing stories of the crime which did great credit to the fertility of the imaginations of the reporters who were detailed to work up the case. Those who read these stories might have had warrant almost for believing that each writer must have been the principal, so intimately and minutely was the crime reconstructed.

But throughout the public excitement and conjecture which the burglary created Lynton Hora and Guy remained entirely undisturbed, or at the most merely stirred to mild amusement as each new theory was evolved—each was so very wide of the mark.

Yet audacious as many of these theories were, none of them paralleled the audacity of the real attempt.

How the burglary had been carried out was explained by Guy when, refreshed by six hours' sleep and a cold bath, he joined Myra and Hora at the breakfast table.

"I followed your plans almost exactly," he said to the elder man, "and I found the interior of the house precisely as you described it."

"H'm," chuckled Hora, glancing at a print hung upon the wall opposite him, "that Morland would have been a cheap investment, even if it had been a fake. As it is——"

"As it is," laughed Guy, "your capital has returned to you more than a thousandfold. Still, I can't help marvelling at your wonderful eye for detail. You could not have been in Flurscheim's house more than an hour, and yet I found every wire, every lock, every catch exactly where you told me I should find them. Some of the doors and windows you could never have seen. How could you know?"

"It was not through any capacity for seeing through brick walls," said Hora drily, "but merely a deduction from what Flurscheim himself did not tell me. He was very proud of the system of alarms designed by himself for the protection of his treasures. He told me that it was impossible for a window-sash to be lifted or an outer door to be unlatched without setting off the alarm. I observed from outside that the attics

were fitted with swing casements, and I drew my own conclusions."

"You omitted to inform me that the servants slept in those attics," remarked Guy. "I nearly stepped on to the bed of one of them when I entered the window."

"So that is why you left by the front door, was it?" inquired Hora. "It was a little bit risky, wasn't it?"

"No," said the young man; "I calculated that I should get a minute's start, and thirty seconds was quite enough. As a matter of fact I had a clear minute. I looked out into the street from a window and saw that the coast was clear and the brougham was waiting. There were two or three parties just leaving Lady Greyston's, and I calculated upon being able to join them without exciting observation. The street was very much in shadow and just between lights. After a dance, you know, no one observes very clearly."

"Still it was a risk," observed Hora. "I should have returned by the way I had gone."

"I still think I faced the lesser evil," replied Guy. "Besides the chance of finding Flurscheim's servants awake, there was the possibility of being seen from the street as I passed along the parapet back to the window of the Greystons' house. Then, suppose I had met some one on the stairs at the Greystons'. The function was practically over. There was every likelihood that some of the servants would be going

to their quarters. It would have been deuced unpleasant to have had to explain what I was doing upstairs."

"At all events," remarked Hora, "you ought to have cut off the alarm. Did you forget how to do it?"

A smile flickered across the young man's face.

"No," he said; "I left it in position on purpose. I thought I should like to give Flurscheim a sporting chance of getting his own back. There were just two flights of stairs and a bedroom door between us. I thought that if that were not sufficient to enable me to get away I should deserve to be captured."

Myra, who had been listening to the conversation in silence, half uttered an exclamation, but she checked it so that only Hora's keen ears heard. He smiled, but said nothing. Guy continued lazily: "You see that I did not misjudge the conditions. I am here." Then he repeated the words he had used a few hours previously. "You must set me a more difficult task next time, Commendatore."

"What an enthusiast you are," remarked Hora. "If you go on at this rate there will be nothing left for you to do."

"I hate being idle," remarked the young man.

"Never fear, never fear," said Hora, "I have no doubt you will manage to amuse yourself. You did so last night, did you not?"

Although the question was asked carelessly the

young man flushed slightly as he answered, "Tolerably well."

"Only tolerably well?" asked Hora. "And yet you postponed your enterprise until almost too late for only 'tolerable' amusement."

"Admitted, Commendatore," answered Guy gaily; "the adverb is not sufficient. To tell the truth, I met some very pleasant people and the time passed swiftly."

Myra sprung the next question.

"Who were they, Guy? Any one I have met?"

"No," he answered. "A Captain and Mrs. Marven and——"

He did not get to the end of his sentence. Lynton Hora had risen from his chair and interrupted him. "Who did you say? Say the name again," he cried hoarsely.

Both Myra and Guy looked at him in amazement. Hora was not given to showing emotion, and there could be no doubt but that he was deeply moved. His lips were drawn closely together, beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead, every line in his face deepened.

"What's the matter, Commendatore—father?" cried Guy in alarm as he sprang to Hora's side and laid his hand on the elder man's arm.

Hora shook off the touch roughly.

"Say the name again," he repeated.

"Marven," repeated Guy, "Captain Marven."

Gradually Hora regained control of himself. His

features resumed their normal air of petulant acquiescence with the world, but there was a gleam in his eyes which revealed a very different spirit within him. Presently he spoke.

"You are surprised to see me so much moved by the mention of a name; you would not be if you knew what reason I have to hate the possessor of it. So you found Captain Marven very good company, eh, Guy?" He laughed sardonically.

"Why, yes," replied the young man.

"I wonder," he mused, "if you would have thought him as entertaining if you knew the part he has played in my life."

"In your life?" queried Myra and Guy in the same breath.

"In my life," repeated Hora with deliberation. Then he continued, in accents which showed how deeply memories of the past rankled, "That is the man, Guy, to whose actions my quarrel with the world is due. Owing to him I found every man's hand raised against me. Owing to him I was compelled in self-defence to raise my hand against every man. Owing to him I became another Ishmael—thrust out into the world, branded, a mark for every man's scorn and every woman's jeers. Oh, I have taken my revenge upon the scorners," he laughed harshly, "but not upon him—not upon him—yet."

He paused, and once more it was only with an effort that he regained control of himself. He did not again

trust himself to speech. He turned on his heel abruptly. At the door he paused.

"You have given me much to think about, Guy," he said. "At present I am unable to think calmly. Some other time I will discuss the matter with you."

He left the room swiftly, and the firm step of his sound leg and the following shuffle as he dragged the other foot along after it, was the only sound to be heard until the closing of another door told Myra and Guy that he had shut himself in his own apartment.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF A CRIMINAL

THE philosophy of Lynton Hora had for once given way under the stress of a deep emotion. There could be no doubt about that, and no doubt either that the emotion which had strained the philosophy to breaking-point was the emotion of hate.

Never before had Guy seen him so wrought upon. Often he had regretted that the man he called father should have been of so calm a temperament—regretted even while he admired. Himself of an impulsive, even ardent nature, he had longed to express his feelings to the one being who had been his sole companion from infancy, who had treated him with unfailing and unvarying kindness, but who chilled, with what appeared to be temperamental coldness, any expression of affection.

Guy was thrilled with the discovery that a deep sea of passion underlay Hora's cold exterior. If Hora hated, of necessity he must also love. He must love him, Guy Hora, his son. Did not every action in his life show it?

The thought awakened Guy's memory actively. His

earliest memories were of the Commendatore. He had no knowledge of a mother or but shadowy recollections, and those might merely be the offspring of his own imagination. Lynton Hora had been father and mother both. Guy could recall Hora's face bending over his bed in the days of his babyhood. He had one vivid recollection of being parted from his father when he himself was about seven years old. He had been left in the charge of some dark-haired, swarthy-faced people, and they had neglected him—had beaten him. How he had cried for his father, and when his father had returned he remembered running to him and sobbing out his tale of misery. He remembered how Hora had told him that men never cried when they were hurt, and how that he, stricken with shame, had answered that it was not the beating but the loneliness which had brought the tears to his eyes.

Hora had smiled and had left him alone for a few minutes. He had smiled still more when he returned. Guy remembered seeing the man who had beaten him later that same day with a bruised face and an arm hanging helpless in a sling from his neck.

But that was not his most vivid memory of Hora's return. Chiefly it was a conversation that took place when Hora had taken the boy's hand and led him up into the mountains. Often the boy had recalled the words which had been spoken to him. He could never see a pine tree without their being fresh spoken to his ear, for they had been uttered beneath the pine woods,

on the edge of a translucent mountain lake, which mirrored the snowy peaks above it so perfectly that it seemed strange that the pebbles at the bottom could be counted.

Hora had taken the boy's tears as his text.

"Women weep when they are hurt," he said. "Men strike back—remember that, Guy; remember, too, that if you cannot strike with the arm that there are other ways of driving the blow home."

Though Guy had understood the meaning of Hora's words but dimly then, he had remembered them, and, later, he understood. Hora had often given practical illustration of his precepts. He never forgot an injury or a slight, and Guy was often allowed to see how Hora avenged either. Memory has no chronological exactitude, and as Guy allowed his thoughts to drift an instance occurred to him which had occurred some years later. They had been travelling in France together, and had been hurrying on to Italy. The one other traveller in the same compartment had been a blusterous Englishman of the most unpleasantly self-assertive type. Hora had attempted to engage him in conversation, and had met with a surly repulse. When the frontier was reached the assertive person was asleep. Hora had dexterously possessed himself of the man's watch, and when the customs official made his appearance had transferred, with equal dexterity, the watch to his pocket, leaving a portion of the chain visible. When awakened, the Englishman discovered

his loss almost immediately. The official was before him asking him, in a language he did not comprehend, whether he had any dutiable articles to declare. The visible piece of chain caught the eye of the excited passenger. He made a grab at the presumed thief. The official, thinking he was being attacked by a madman, made a wild dive for the door and reached the platform. The Englishman followed in pursuit and captured his man. There was a wild mêlée, from which the victim did not emerge victorious. When the train moved on Hora was gratified by seeing their late companion ineffectually struggling in the grasp of half a dozen stalwart carabinieri.

Guy was fifteen years old when this event had happened, and long before then he had imbibed from his father ideas of morality which were directly at variance with those generally accepted. Guy could never remember a time when Hora had bade him restrain any desire. How well he recalled a day—he could not have been more than six—when they had passed a shop wherein a basket of golden oranges were displayed. "Buy me one," he had cried. Hora had stopped. There was no one in the shop. "I'll teach you a new game," he said. "Go and fetch a couple, Guy; mind you choose the best," he said. Guy had obeyed, and Hora had praised him. As Guy ate the oranges he thought the game the best he had ever heard of. Next day they had passed the shop and Guy was about to repeat the foray, but Hora had

restrained him. "Look, Guy," he said. "There is somebody there now; when you want oranges or anything else without paying you must be quite sure there is no one about, or you will lose the game." Guy remembered the precept and acted upon it. It was a delightful new game for any one to play if one were only clever enough to play it properly. Guy used to beg Hora to take him out for a day's stealing, and sometimes, as a reward for perseverance in his studies, Hora would accede to the boy's request. He had no notion that he was doing anything wrong, though he had been taught that there were things he must not do. He knew that he must not tell his father a lie; he knew, too, that he was to be silent when bidden.

Of course, a time eventually arrived when he had become conscious that there was some lack of harmony between the life he and his father led and the lives of those upon whom they preyed. Hora had taken the boy to see a big penal establishment, and his curiosity had been stirred as to the reason of this gathering of men in mud-coloured garb marked all over with broad arrows. "Why are they all dressed alike? Why do their masters carry guns?" he asked.

Hora had silenced him with a sign at the time, but later, when they were alone, he had explained.

"They are all men who have been trying to play the game of stealing and have lost," he said. "If you were to get caught, you would be taken away and shut up at night in a cell all alone, and dressed in ugly clothes;

and when you went out, men with guns would be set to watch you so that they should shoot you if you tried to run away."

"Have you ever been caught, father?" Guy asked.

Hora had never replied to that question. His face had grown so dark that Guy had forborne to press for an answer, and the memory of the singular expression which had passed over his countenance had been sufficient to prevent him ever repeating the inquiry.

After the visit to the convict establishment Guy had been timorous at playing his new game, but Hora had chaffed him, advised him, stood beside him, protected him, until he became exceedingly dexterous in a variety of forms of petty larceny. He was never allowed at this time to mix with other boys. Hora had him always under his own eye, educating him according to a system which was a fair sample of the average boy's education as regards matter, but differing vastly from the average boy's education as regards the application of the knowledge imparted to him. Cæsar was never to him a mere handbook by which the intricacies of a dead language were revealed, but a wonderful history of a man who played the game of stealing in a great way. Hora made quite clear to the boy's mind that there was only a difference in degree between the stealing of oranges and the stealing of kingdoms, but that if one wanted to steal kingdoms it was just as well to begin early, and learn the first principles of the art by stealing the oranges. He ex-

plained, too, that the world looked with very different eyes upon the theft of a crown and the theft of an apple. The man who annexed an empire was an emperor whom men acclaimed and set on a throne in a garb of purple, while the man who stole a loaf of bread to assuage his hunger was a petty thief at whom the world hurled opprobrium and thrust into a prison garbed in mud-coloured clothes covered over with broad arrows.

Guy began to comprehend what Hora intended him to comprehend, that there was something mean about petty theft, and he no longer found pleasure in his game, but turned instead to the weaving of romances of imperial depredations.

Even the fiction which was supplied by Hora for the boy's amusement was insidiously utilized for the inculcation of the same perverted morality. With Robinson Crusoe, for instance, it was easy for a man of Hora's mental equipment to make fun of Crusoe's naive dependence upon Providence and his exhibition of piety in moments of stress. Hora pointed out that Crusoe's prayers were mere expression of the terror of an uneducated mind when confronted with personal danger—of a mind which had been trained in youth to rely upon supernatural agencies for relief and comfort. He pointed out that Crusoe really secured his own safety through the exercise of his own constructive and observatory powers, and through no other agency.

As Guy grew older Hora sedulously built upon the

foundation of disbelief which he laid down as the basis of the boy's education. He was taught that religion was merely the means by which a priestarchy levied toll upon the body corporate by playing upon inherited superstitions — history supplied him with plenty of illustrations. History supplied him, too, with plenty of examples to point the arguments with which he supported what was in effect a complete criminal philosophy. Guy was not taught only that atheism was the hope of humanity. Hora had read much of Neitzsche, and he skilfully adopted the Neitzschean philosophy to his purpose. A particular appeal to Guy's mind was found in Hora's definition of virtue as a thirst for danger and courage for the forbidden. As translated by Hora, both in precept and practice, the highest virtue was to be found in the breaking of laws. He imbibed the doctrines avidly, for Hora had a persuasive tongue. He learned at the same time to keep them to himself, for, as Hora explained, if sheep knew as much as men, men would have no mutton.

Until eighteen, Guy's education progressed under his father's tuition, and then, feeling sure of him, Hora thought it time to launch him on the world. Guy went to Oxbridge to make acquaintance with his fellows, to survey the flock of sheep which were to supply him with mutton in the future. The time then passed pleasantly enough, and plenty of active exercise supplied him with a vent for his energies. He did not shear any of the sheep, for Hora had bidden him stay

his hand. A blameless University career would, he knew, be of great value to him in the future.

When Guy came down from the University it was with the reputation of being one of its wildest spirits. Great things were predicted of him. Others might excel him in individual efforts in the field and the schools, but none could excel him in fearlessness of demeanour. Besides, Hora's education had supplied him with a serene belief in himself which had been communicated to those with whom he came in contact. He had been the leader of a set, the model for the fresher, the autocrat of his time. Like most autocrats, he cherished a profound contempt for those who bowed down before him. He was to them as his father was to him—something so much greater that their tribute became merely a thing of no account. He understood why his father had no affection for him. How could any one love the thing beneath ; the moth could love the star, but the star could not love the moth, and——

Guy awoke from the reverie into which he had been betrayed by his father's emotion on hearing the name of Captain Marven mentioned. He was quite alone. Myra had left the room after vainly trying to engage his attention. His hand unconsciously sought his pocket, and when he drew it out he held in his palm the snuff-box he had reserved for himself from the booty he had brought home on the previous night. He gazed earnestly at the miniature set in the lid.

"So Captain Marven is father's enemy," he muttered, "and this—this must be a portrait of Captain Marven's niece."

His face grew troubled; his brow puckered. He thrust the box back into his pocket and rose impatiently from his seat.

"Bah!" he said. "What says the Commendatore? Man is trained for war, and woman for the relaxation of the warrior; all else is folly." Nevertheless he replaced the box carefully in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV

THE REFLECTIONS OF LYNTON HORA

THERE was undoubted reason why the name of Marven should move Lynton Hora to emotion. It swept him back over the thirty years which bridged him from his youth. He would not have answered to the name of Hora in those days, the days when he and James Marven—" Gay " Marven—had been subalterns together in the same cavalry regiment. But the name he had borne then was buried and forgotten long since, and the young man who had borne it was dead to the knowledge of the world, though his virtues and his vices, his memories and hatreds—most certainly his hatreds—lived actively in the recluse connoisseur and antiquarian, Lynton Hora.

He had had good reason for burying his earlier self—an all-sufficing excuse for blotting out his existence from his regimental companions, from the friends of his youth, from the parents who had wept over his downfall perhaps even more than they had mourned the presumed death which had followed his punishment.

The name of Marven had brought vividly before his

mind a picture of the bitterest moment of his life. Never could the memory of that moment lose the poignancy of its sting. The hollow square in the barrack-yard, the epaulets he had once worn on his shoulder lying on the ground, the look of scorn on the faces of his brother officers, and reflected on the faces of the men who had been till then beneath him, for the convicted thief—he saw these things clearly at the mention of Captain Marven's name.

He had always held that Marven was responsible for his dishonour—Marven who had everything which he, Hora, had desired and which fate had denied him. On the day he had first met him envy had entered into his heart. The contented smile on Marven's face, the expression which declared that everything is the best possible in the best possible world had irritated him. Hora had not shown his irritation. Early in his youth he had learned to control the expression of his feelings. But companionship had deepened the irritation day by day. Gay Marven was the most popular man in the mess, Hora the least. Marven was wealthy, a credit to a smart cavalry regiment; Hora's allowance barely sufficed to meet the bare necessary expenditure, and so he was debarred from indulging in the extravagances which his comrades affected.

Some of them sneered at him, and Hora attributed the sneers to Marven's influence, though wrongfully, and his irritation became anger.

Later, a greater cause of jealousy arose through the

interposition of the essential feminine element in all drama. Hora had fallen hopelessly in love, and he had reason to think that the affection he had bestowed would be returned. Then Marven appeared on the scene, and Hora's hopes had vanished. Marven had only to be natural to dazzle the eyes of all beholders with the rays of his sunshiny disposition. Hora's temperament was of an intellectual coldness more likely to provoke esteem than love. The attack of erotitis which attacked both of them accentuated in each his natural characteristics. Marven became more brilliant than ever, Hora more passionately reserved. Then Hora, his natural judgment in suspension, had imagined that it would be possible to out-dazzle Marven. Reckless of consequences, he joined in all the pursuits from which he had hitherto stood aloof. His useful charger had been replaced by two magnificent mounts. His tailor had been made temporarily happy by a swiftly swelling account. He had begun to entertain lavishly—a year's income apart from his pay would not have met one single week's expenditure. He had known that the pace could not last, but fate had been kind to him at the outset. He had speculated on the turf and had won. From the card table, too, he rarely rose a loser, and the play that went on in the card-room of the mess when the Colonel was not there would have genuinely shocked the commanding officer had he been aware of the amount of the stakes at issue. Hora's comrades thought he had come in for

a legacy, and he was no longer deemed a discredit to their ranks.

Though delayed, the day when the inevitable reckoning was to be met could not be averted for ever. When fortune frowned instead of smiling upon his turf speculations he was forced to visit the Jews. There he could obtain but trifling accommodation, for he had never had any expectations and was heir to nothing but an unstained name. Even the five hundred pounds he had ultimately raised was only advanced at ruinous interest on a three months' bill. He had plunged more wildly than ever. He had lost. He had become short of cash to meet his daily out-of-pocket expenses. Even then he might have been saved from utter extinction had not he imagined that he had succeeded in putting his rival in the shade. He had staked everything upon one last hazard. There had been under his control certain regimental funds. He had made use of them, knowing full well that so soon as his anticipated engagement was announced he would have no difficulty in obtaining a further loan, since the object of rivalry between Marven and himself was wealthy as well as beautiful. With that loan he had counted on being able to replace the money he had embezzled. But Marven was before him, and the day Marven's engagement to Beatrice Challis was announced an unexpected investigation of Hora's accounts by the colonel of the regiment disclosed the defalcation. Hora was placed under arrest, and the torrent rushed over him.

When he had reached his own apartment Lynton Hora spared himself not a single pang of the bitterness of the memories of what had followed. The weary days under arrest. The long-drawn-out inquiries, the court-martial, the day of the promulgation of the sentence, when he was drummed out of the regiment and had walked out of the barrack-yard into the hands of the civil police who were awaiting him to bring him to further trial.

He had been spared nothing. There was no influence which could have been exerted to save him from any one of the ignominies which he had incurred. He had supplied an excellent example for exhibiting the impartiality of the law. No private in the ranks should be able to say that he received harsher treatment than the officer of a crack cavalry regiment.

He had faced his punishment bravely; indeed, he had welcomed the solitude of the cell when he had eventually exchanged his cavalry dress for another of H.M.'s uniforms. There he had not to meet the scorn of men's eyes.

One by one he recalled the incidents. They had never ceased to pain him, even though he tried to laugh at his weakness in imagining that the wound to his pride still rankled. But he would not have been without that smarting sore. He took the same fierce satisfaction in the pain with which the martyrs of Smithfield solaced themselves as they thrust their arms into the fire. He told himself always that the mental

suffering, the intolerable scorn he had faced, had shown him the world as it is and not as it pretends to be. He postulated a deceitful, hypocritical world with a smile on its face for the man of wealth, and a frown and a brick for the poor devil who had the will to enjoy and not the means to gratify his longings.

Before his disgrace he had hated only one man, afterwards he hated all men and at least one woman—she who preferred Gay Marven, Fortune's favourite, to himself, Fortune's scapegoat. But, in addition to enabling him to appreciate the smiles and frowns of the world at their proper worth, he told himself that his experience had made a man of him. It certainly left him a purposeful, resourceful, scrupleless being with a definite object in existence.

That object was revenge. Revenge on the world which had scorned him, revenge on the world which had labelled him criminal, revenge, above all, upon Marven.

He had made all his plans long before his sentence had expired. He saw that he must die to the world if the future was to have any promise at all, for a past such as his would have been an incubus no man might carry for long. So when his term of imprisonment was over he disappeared in the broad light of day. At least, the ex-convict disappeared from English eyes when he sculled out to sea in a fair-weather craft from a south-coast watering-place. A day or two later the overturned boat was picked up with the ex-convict's

coat still entangled in the seat and with his ticket-of-leave still in the pocket. There was nothing to connect the Lynton Hora who a few weeks later landed from an English tramp steamer at an Italian port with the missing man.

Hora had not found existence present many difficulties. He had buried his scruples with his identity, and a man of brains, with courage and no scruples, need never look very far for the means of subsistence. For a while he preyed on British tourists. They were of his own race and therefore his chiefest enemies; and, besides, he knew that since he would need a place where he might build a reputation and a new identity if his purpose were to be fulfilled, it would be unwise to prey upon the inhabitants of the selected spot. Italy appealed to him. He became, to all intents and purposes, Italian. An English soapmaker's wife "seeing" the Eternal City supplied him, unwittingly, with funds to purchase a vineyard in Tuscany. He stocked his farm and furnished a house with the contents of a duchess's jewel casket. The capital necessary for pursuing his agricultural operations was provided indirectly by the Casino authorities at Monte Carlo. Hora had ventured no stake at the tables. He had merely relieved a successful gambler of his winnings. Thus provided with a home, he had paid a visit to England. When he returned six months later he brought his reputed son with him, a child of three; and away in England, his old comrade, now Captain

Marven, together with Mrs. Marven, had mourned beside an empty cot in their nursery.

Hora had succeeded in the initial step towards the accomplishment of his revenge. But this had been only the first step. His appetite was not to be sated with one simple meal of vengeance. His rival, like himself, should never be allowed to forget his loss. So punctually every year on the anniversary of the stolen boy's birthday Marven had received a brief type-written note stating that the child was alive and well—nothing more. Hora would gladly have signed the note with his forgotten name, but that thereby he might have incurred danger to himself and the overthrow of his whole scheme of revenge. When the appointed time came, when the child was full grown, when by his own acts the child should be damned beyond all redemption—then the woman who had refused his offer of marriage should have her son restored to her, the rival who had won that woman's love from him should have the paternity of the criminal thrust upon him, and the whole world should be made aware of Guy's real parentage. That was the complete scheme of revenge Hora contemplated; to consummate which he had instilled into the baby ears the subtle poison of his perverted morality, had skilfully taken advantage of the boy's adventurous nature to interest him in the romantic possibilities of a criminal career, had laboured and watched the unfolding of a mind with the patience of a Japanese gardener pro-

ducing a dwarfed and twisted miniature of a fair tree of the forest.

He had been discreet in his work. He had no intention of making of his pupil a rod for his own scourging. His conception of the great criminal he desired to make of Guy had nothing in common with the average conception of a person given to indulgence in all the commonplace vices of humanity. Self-control he had early realized was of more importance to the man who was waging single-handed warfare with the world than to the units of the community with whom he was at issue. His own predilections, too, were instinctively refined. The grosser forms of self-indulgence had never appealed to him. He was an epicure of life, and had no desire to spoil his palate with a surfeit of coarse pleasures. Clean living himself, he demanded cleanliness of life in those about him. To what happened outside his own household he was cynically indifferent.

Guy had proved a credit to his training. He was healthy in body, full of the enthusiasm of living, and possessed of a fine rapture for the profession to which he had served his apprenticeship. Almost the time was ripe for the consummation of Hora's revenge when chance had brought Guy into contact with his real parents. This was a contingency Hora had not foreseen, and it needed careful consideration. He did not fear that the relationship would be disclosed. Guy himself had no suspicion of the facts. He knew no

parent but Hora, though he believed that he remembered the mother whom Hora had invented for his benefit, whose portrait hung on the wall of his bedroom and of whom Hora had spoken to him on many occasions. Yes, Guy Marven's real identity was sufficiently sunken in that of Guy Hora to ensure him against discovery, even though physical likeness should lead to comment.

Yet Hora's first emotion on learning that his foster-son had met his father and mother was one he thought he had banished for ever. A sensation of fear had passed over him, a dread lest the natural inclination of son to mother should manifest itself, lest the blood which pulsed eagerly in the son's arteries should cry out to the blood which ran more sluggishly in his father's veins, and, his own mock relationship disestablished, there be destroyed the living instrument for his revenge he had spent so many years in fashioning. Nor had his only fear been for the loss of his whole scheme of revenge. He realized for the first time that his interest in Guy was more than that of the artist in his artistry. Guy had always looked to him, had repaid him for his attention with all the warmth of an affectionate nature. He was the one being in whom, save Myra, Hora had taken a personal interest. Suppose some one else were to take his, Hora's place, in the young man's thoughts? The dread was in his mind, though he would not acknowledge it—though he denied its existence. That would

be a piece of sentimentalism utterly foreign to his whole nature. He told himself that he had no affection for the child of his adoption save that of the master craftsman in his tool. Of course, he would regret the necessity, when it arose, of giving the tool to destruction, but he would admit to himself no warmer interest in Guy's fate than that.

Self-persuaded on the point, he considered whether the meeting of which he had been apprised might not be utilized for the furtherance of his plans. Nor was it long before he became persuaded that Fate was playing into his hands. Supposing that the acquaintance developed into intimacy. A thousand vague possibilities floated shadow-like before Hora's eyes. He determined that the acquaintance should be continued, but, still fearful, he determined also that Guy should be plunged more deeply into the vortex of crime than hitherto, so that, struggle and strive as he might, he should find it impossible to escape. Fortunately for his purpose Guy had expressed himself as hungering for further adventure. Well, Hora was fertile of plans, and he saw very good reasons why Guy's desires should be humoured. His household saw nothing more of the Commendatore that day. He remained alone with his thoughts.

CHAPTER V

THE COMMENDATORE MAKES A DEDUCTION

"WE are getting near the end of our resources, Guy," remarked Hora quietly, as he held a glass of port up to the light, sipped the wine, nodded his head approvingly, and set the glass down gently.

It was the evening of the second day after Hora's exhibition of emotion upon hearing the name of Marven. He had not referred again to the object of his hatred, and neither Myra nor Guy, who sat with him at the table, had prompted his memory.

Guy looked round the room before he answered. He had been well trained in the observance of caution. But the servants had retired, the door was closed. The three were alone.

"All London offers replenishment of our empty coffers," he answered light-heartedly. "Who is to have the honour?" He turned to Myra. "Shall I peel a peach for you?" he asked.

The woman seemed not to hear the question. She was looking at Hora with an appeal in her glance.

Hora answered her glance. "Myra is tired of London," he remarked. "What do you say, Guy?

Shall we finish the campaign now, strike our tents, and retire like contented bourgeoisie to our vineyard to watch the grapes ripen ? "

Guy's eyebrows arched in surprise. " Retire empty-handed ? " he asked incredulously. " Why, what has come upon you, Commendatore ? "

" Myra is tired," he answered briefly.

Guy looked smilingly at her. She flushed slightly.

" Not a bit of it," he answered. " I am quite sure she does not desire to exchange the delights of a London season even for the *dolce far niente* of an Italian summer."

" I should not mind," she answered. " London is a beastly place. The Commendatore is right. I am sick of the sight and sound of people and of the perpetual menace of our life—I——"

Hora checked her speech with a gesture. The door opened and a servant entered with coffee, and while he was present the conversation passed lightly over topics of the day.

" I don't like that man," said Guy, as the servant withdrew. " I caught him prying about amongst my belongings the other day when I returned to the flat unexpectedly."

" All servants do that," murmured Hora indifferently. " Curiosity is the mental badge of servitude. The servant is never happy until he has surprised one of his master's secrets. It would be just as well, Guy, if you were to supply him with a few facts to

exercise his imagination upon. Get some girl to write you a few love-letters, and hide them where he can find them. He will never be at a loss, then, to supply a reason for any erratic movement of yours."

Guy laughed. "Not a bad suggestion," he agreed. "Do you adopt the same plan to protect yourself?"

Hora shrugged his shoulders. "I carefully built up my own reputation in advance," he remarked. "Haven't I told you? I suppose not, for you were both too young when I first located myself here." He looked round the pleasant dining-room complacently. "I've had the place for ten years now, and for one's name to be for ten years in the London Directory at the same address is a certificate of respectability which is not easily discredited."

"Still, I wonder that you did not seek greater privacy," remarked Guy as he lit a cigarette.

Hora smiled. "A desire for privacy always awakens suspicion, and thus in our profession privacy *de facto* is perhaps the one luxury we cannot afford. Nevertheless, a greater degree of privacy is possible in the midst of a crowd than would be possible anywhere else in the wide world. This is not such a paradoxical statement as it sounds. In the crowd no one is intent on the doings of his neighbours. Put a ring fence round a man and every eye would be fixed upon him. Thus you see my reason for selecting a residential flat for my London residence. The servants are not mine. Each of them has half a dozen other objects of curi-

osity. When they have attended to our requirements they disappear."

"But nevertheless they must be curious concerning the contents of the art gallery."

The allusion was to a portion of the abode into which the servants were not supposed to enter. Though situated on the eighth story, Hora's flat at Westminster Mansions was not the ultimate achievement of the builder. Above were attics, to which a narrow staircase gave entrance. The stairs were shut off by a door, and the door was always locked.

"When I see any signs of curiosity I always take an early opportunity of gratifying it," said Hora. "Every one of the servants who has ever waited upon me has had the privilege of inspecting that chamber, and not one of them has ever been sufficiently interested to enter it a second time, except at my especial request. You see, they are all aware why I took possession of the attic. They think it is a fad of a nervous invalid. Those attics were entered from another staircase when first I took the flat, and some of the servants slept there. I complained of the noise continually. Half a dozen of the poor devils must have been dismissed at one time or another for purely imaginary offences in consequence. Then I declared I could stay no longer and I gave notice to leave. The agent for the landlord was apologetic and asked if there was no way in which he would not be able to meet me. I offered to rent the place, saying that I

would make it into a store-room for the books and trifles which I am continually accumulating. He jumped at the offer I made, and I know he thought me a fool." Hora chuckled. "How surprised he would be to learn that the proceeds of many a rich haul have been stored there for months. But I have drifted away from my original point. I was telling you of the manner in which I built up my original reputation for eccentricity, the safest cloak a man may wear. It was a simple matter. I merely answered for myself the references I gave to my landlord. I described myself as an unfavourable tenant from every point of view but the pecuniary one. My habits I described as irregular, my requirements exacting to a degree, my manner brusque and overbearing, and my disposition faddy and changeable, and I further said I was given to making continual requests for structural alterations in any dwelling-place that I occupied, in order to make accommodation for any new collecting craze which seized me."

"I wonder any landlord ventured to accept you," laughed Myra.

"The London landlord has a high opinion of his capability for withstanding the demands of his tenants," said Hora drily. "He is a man lavish of promises but meagre of fulfilments, and possessed of a genius for extracting the uttermost farthing of his rent. Moreover, he would take Satan himself as a tenant if he offered to pay six months' rent in advance.

Naturally I proved acceptable, and not turning out to be the terror I depicted myself I am now looked upon as the best tenant in the whole building. I am free to do as I like. My treasure-house ceases to excite curiosity, and I believe if I were to place the crown jewels upon one of the tables up there, they would be undisturbed, so long as my rent was paid regularly, until they were hidden beneath the accumulated dust of ages."

The allusion gave Guy an idea.

"Do you contemplate an imitation of Colonel Blood's exploit for the replenishment of our empty exchequer?" he said, smiling.

"I have often envied Blood's opportunities," answered Hora thoughtfully, "but at the present day there are much greater difficulties in the way than Blood had to contend with. Some day, perhaps, but just now I have another scheme in my mind." He rose from the table. "I have something to tell you," he remarked. "You will excuse me for a minute."

He left the room. As the door closed on Hora, Myra turned eagerly to her companion. She felt that despite her promise to Hora she must give utterance to the fears which once again possessed her mind.

"Guy," she said, "I wish you would persuade the Commendatore to leave London for a while. He would listen to any wish of yours."

"Do you think so?" he asked. "I don't think

that any expression of mine would turn him from any purpose he has in view."

"But can you not try?" she persisted. "For my sake, Guy."

"Why, whatever is the matter with you, Myra?" asked the young man, his attention captured by the obvious anxiety in her voice. "Surely you are not becoming afraid?"

"Becoming afraid?" she repeated after him mechanically. "No, I am not becoming afraid. I learned what fear was long ago, when first I ventured to put my own desires in opposition to the will of the Commendatore. I have always been afraid since then." She fell to silence.

"There's no reason to fear the Commendatore," answered Guy cheerfully. "You are growing morbid, Myra."

She paid no heed to his comment. "It is not fear now, or at least not what is generally understood by fear. There is an oppression in the air; the weight of something unseen and unknown presses on me."

"But there is nothing for you to fear. Whatever were to happen you would be quite safe," argued Guy.

"Myself? It is not myself I am thinking about," she cried passionately. "Whatever impends does not threaten me. It is you, Guy, I fear for. Ever since the night of Lady Greyston's dance I have felt it. I thought you would never return that evening; but you came back, and for a while I could laugh at my

fears. But now the Commendatore has some other proposal to make my dread has returned. I shall not have a moment's rest."

"Why, this is sheer hysteria, if not madness," said Guy in great concern.

"Call it what you like," she replied earnestly, "but listen to what I say—promise me——"

She heard Hora's lagging footstep in the passage outside and she ceased speaking suddenly. "Not a word of this to the Commendatore," she said hastily as the door opened and Hora re-entered.

If the elder man observed that his re-entry had broken in upon a confidence from which he was excluded he gave no signs of having done so. Myra breathed more freely when he seated himself again at the table and spread out a newspaper he had brought with him on the table.

"There are three items of news in this evening's paper," he remarked quietly, "which supply the data from which may be deduced the means whereby an enterprising man may build a fortune."

Guy was all attention on the instant, and Myra, viewing his keen face, let her head droop upon her hand.

"Those items are?" queried the young man as Hora paused.

"You will find the first in the Court News," was the reply. "The Right Hon. Sir Gadsby Dimbleby, who is the minister in attendance upon His Majesty the King, arrived at Sandringham last night."

"The Minister for Foreign Affairs, is he not?" asked Guy.

Hora nodded and turned to another page, from which he read: "'Just before the close all markets sagged badly on selling orders from Berlin. A variety of rumours were afloat as to the reason, but no definite information, which would supply justification for a bear raid on the market, was forthcoming from any well-informed quarter. In the street afterwards prices were put up again generally, though fluctuations were considerable."

"Yes," said Guy, beginning to look puzzled.

"The third item is a mere addition to the Reuter's telegram from Australia giving particulars of the cricket match between the English and Australian teams. The result is placed in the space left for late news, and over it are the words 'Delayed in transmission.'"

Hora ceased speaking.

"If the rehabilitation of our fortunes depends upon translating that puzzle we shall end our days in the workhouse yet," said Guy.

"Yet there is much wealth for the man who can piece together those scraps of information and will act promptly on the knowledge," answered Hora.

"How? By speculation on the Stock Exchange?" asked Guy. "I thought, Commendatore, that you eschewed all forms of gambling."

"I do," said Hora drily. "But to buy and sell on

a certainty has nothing of the gambling element about it. I feel inclined to make either the bulls or the bears contribute to our maintenance. But action must be prompt if it is to succeed. There is work for you to do to-night, Guy, if you care about it."

"Care about it?" The young man sprang to his feet, every fibre of his frame quivering for action.

Hora laughed good-naturedly. "There—there, Guy, take matters a bit easily. There's plenty of time before you yet if you decide to go on with the job. It's more risky than the last."

"The greater the risk the better I shall be pleased!" exclaimed Guy as he dropped again into his chair; "though how you are going to evolve anything of a risky nature from those paragraphs you have just read I entirely fail to understand."

"You'll understand soon enough," remarked Hora quietly, "and you will then be surprised that the meaning of these three items of news should have conveyed so little to you. Let me reverse the order and read into these three facts my own conclusions. What can be the reason for the delay in the transmission of the cable containing the cricket result? Either the cable had broken down, or it was monopolized for some important work. The former theory is untenable, for if you take the trouble to compare the time of the insertion of the news with the time when it should have been inserted you will find a delay of three or four hours only has to be accounted

for. Thus I arrive at the decision that the cable was fully occupied by some one with a prior claim for its use. Who could that be ? Here, again, the choice is between two possibilities—either some big financier or body of financiers, or the Government. Again the indications point to one conclusion. The City was merely uneasy by reason of German selling which could not be accounted for, and not because of information which had come over the wires. Therefore the wires must have been occupied by important despatches to the British Government. I think," said Hora, " that if the knowledge of what has passed over the cable is in my possession by to-morrow morning we shall be in a position to spoil the Egyptians of Throgmorton Street to some purpose."

Guy looked at Hora with admiration. Some idea of his companion's purpose dawned upon him, but only faintly. He asked eagerly for further guidance.

" As to the nature of the despatch which has been received at the Foreign Office I have no more idea than yourself," he continued, " though it probably affects Germany, and it is hardly worth while troubling to guess. I am only concerned with times, places, and people. As I calculate the cable was not clear for ordinary business until close upon six o'clock, six would therefore be very near the time when the end of the message was delivered at the Foreign Office. Of course it would have been cabled in the official cipher. By the time the message would be decoded

there is only one train by which a special messenger could take the decoded despatch to his chief, who happens to be the minister in attendance upon His Majesty at Sandringham."

Hora looked up at the clock. "That train starts from St. Pancras at 9.50. It proceeds as far as Lynn, where the messenger carrying the despatch will probably be met by a motor-car. It is just nine o'clock now, Guy, so there is plenty of time for you to decide whether it is worth while making an effort to obtain the information which will be in his despatch-box."

Guy's eyes sparkled. "It's worth while trying, anyway, Commendatore." He turned to the woman. "Wish me luck, Myra," he said.

CHAPTER VI

WHEREIN A KING'S MESSENGER IS DESPOILED OF HIS DESPATCHES

GUY had ten minutes to spare as he stepped out of the cab at St. Pancras Station, and, handing a bag to a porter, made his way leisurely to the booking office and took a ticket for Lynn. He would have been easily recognized by any of his acquaintance, for he had made no effort to disguise himself. Hora professed no liking for physical or material disguises, contending indeed that such were merely the clumsy devices of incompetence. "The man who anticipates being seen in any affair in which he is not prepared to meet scrutiny is anticipating failure," he was accustomed to declare. "In all other cases," he had told Guy, "your own identity will be your most certain protection. A bourgeoise reputation for wealth and half a dozen society acquaintances will provoke apologies from inquisitive persons when a mere hint that you had dyed your moustache would mean instant arrest." Guy was disposed to agree with him. He disliked the theatrical as much as he was enamoured of the dramatic aspect of his profession.

Yet on this occasion he had not been long on the platform before he was betrayed into the wish that for once he had assumed some disguise. The porter to whom he had entrusted his bag had deposited it in the corner of a first-class smoking compartment, and Guy strolled along the waiting train, glancing into each compartment in turn, in order to locate the messenger, who, if Hora's deductions were correct, was to travel by it. He had made no plans as to the means he was to take to obtain a knowledge of the despatches, nor had Hora made any suggestions.

"I leave the matter entirely in your hands, Guy," he had said. "If you see a favourable opportunity, take it. Opportunity only passes by the unobservant. Still, such may be lacking, and if none presents itself do not strive to make one. One failure in our profession is the end of a career. I don't want to see your career cut short yet. It is a difficult task you have undertaken, and I shall not be surprised if no opportunity presents itself. Don't think I shall blame you."

The words were in his mind as he passed coach after coach and saw no one who seemed at all likely to be the messenger bearing the despatches. He returned to the door of the compartment where his bag lay. A porter came to the door, glanced in, then opened the door of the next compartment and pasted a little label—"reserved"—on the window. Guy, standing

on the platform, looked at the entrance a dozen yards distant. He became conscious of a little thrill of excitement in the thought that Hora's deductions were likely to be proved accurate. It was the next instant that he wished that he had concealed his identity. A passenger made his appearance, and the moment their eyes met Guy recognized him, even as he knew he was himself recognized. It was too late to seek retirement in the train. He stood still while the new-comer advanced with outstretched hand.

"Guy Hora, if I'm not mistaken, by all that's lucky. Going anywhere on this train, eh?"

Mechanically Guy took the offered hand. There was no need for him to attempt to infuse any surprise into his voice. He could only ejaculate "Captain Marven!"

"Himself," said Marven, "and as much surprised to find a friend here as you are." He glanced into the compartment where Guy's bag remained.

"Unless you want to sleep undisturbed, I should propose that we travel together," he remarked.

"If I might intrude," began Guy hesitatingly.

"Intrude? You don't know how delighted I shall be," said Marven heartily. He beckoned the porter who stood holding open the door of the reserved compartment. "Put this gentleman's bag in here," he said. "Now jump in," he continued to Guy.

The young man obeyed. The porter closed the

door, touched his cap, and turned away. Captain Marven tossed a bundle of magazines on the seat and settled himself in a corner. "Better to look upon than magazines is the face of a friend on a five hours' journey," he said laughingly.

"Much better," replied Guy. His first surprise had been succeeded by a second much greater. Captain Marven's coat had swung back as he entered the compartment, and Guy had observed beneath it a despatch-case. It flashed upon him that Captain Marven must be the carrier of the despatches. There seemed to be something uncanny in Hora's prescience. Fate had given him the opportunity which the Commendatore had declared awaited the observant, and it remained for Guy to take advantage of it. But there was a bitter thought commingled with the realization of the fact that the opportunity he desired had been given to him. This man had seemed so friendly disposed towards him from the moment they first met that there seemed to Guy to be something particularly mean in an act of treachery towards him. But he had no opportunity to brood upon the thought, even had he desired to do so, and he did not desire to contemplate it. Besides, not to take full advantage of the opportunity would be treachery to the Commendatore, who was depending upon his success. Guy put aside his new-born scruples and concentrated his attention on the business in hand.

He perceived that he would have to make use of

all his faculties if he were to succeed in his object. The man opposite him would not be easily cozened; but the effort must be made. He began to turn over in his brain a variety of plans while he chatted with his companion.

The whistle sounded, doors banged, the train moved out into the night. There was no escape now. But how was he to gain possession of the case in Captain Marven's possession without exciting suspicion? As a stranger there would have been greater chance of effecting the coup by some sudden stratagem, but positioned as he now found himself he was practically helpless unless Marven should sleep. Guy looked up at the Captain's face. It was an alert face, not the face of a man who sleeps while on duty. It would be difficult to evade the glance of those cool grey eyes, trusting as they seemed. The firm mouth and the set of the jaw told of a character that would not be amenable to sudden panic. Captain Marven was obviously a soldier. How could it be that he was carrying despatches for the Foreign Office? What if he were mistaken? The thought startled the young man from his reverie to hear his query answered.

Captain Marven was speaking to him and he had missed the opening remark. "It's unusual for me to find one of our own set as companion on my frequent journeyings," he said, "though, of course, one does run up against friends occasionally."

"You travel a lot then?" asked Guy mechanically.

"It is the business of a King's messenger," answered Marven drily.

"I didn't know," remarked Guy in genuine surprise, while the thought flashed into his mind that the despatches must be important indeed since they had not been entrusted to the care of one of the ordinary officials of the Foreign Office. "I had no idea that you belonged to that select body."

"Nearly twenty years in the service, my boy," answered Marven. "If I were a motor-car my mileage would be considered something extraordinary, but being only a man——" He ended the comment with a laugh.

Guy echoed it.

"I understood that you were——" He was about to add "a man about town, like myself," but checked himself.

Marven laughed and finished the sentence. "A good-for-nothing idler like yourself, eh, Hora? No," he continued, "I was once. Indeed, to my eternal regret I left the army when I ought to have been thinking seriously of it as a profession; but I had everything I asked of life then, and I rather chafed at my duties. Later"—a shadow passed over his face—"I felt a need to do something which would keep me away from thoughts which—— I wanted some work with movement in it, and having plenty of in-

fluential friends I found myself a superior sort of postman."

Almost the elder man had been betrayed into a confidence. Guy, realizing this, again felt a thrill of distaste for the task he had in hand. Then he wondered if the thoughts from which the King's messenger desired to escape were in any way connected with the events which were responsible for the Commendatore's hatred. After all, this man was the enemy of his, Guy Hora's, father. The enemy through whose actions Lynton Hora had found himself in conflict with the world. Guy hardened his heart. Most possibly the genial mask of friendship which Captain Marven wore was the ordinary disguise of hypocrisy. Guile should be met with guile.

It was with a manner as frank and a smile as confiding as his own that Marven found his questions responded to.

Indeed, he was genuinely interested in the young man. He had already discovered at their first meeting that he was of intelligence beyond the ordinary. He had observed that Guy had been strongly attracted by the niece whom his wife was chaperoning for her first London season, and he thought that it would be well if he could know more of her admirer. But beyond all that Captain Marven had observed what Guy's younger eyes had missed. He saw in the younger man something which reminded him of himself in his own youthful days—a likeness of feature, of carriage,

of manner. The belief that one day the son, his only child, would be restored to him had been an abiding one. It had been partly responsible for his adoption of his present profession. Somewhere his son was growing into manhood. Any day he might meet him.

He made the most of his wide knowledge of the world to secure the young man's confidence, and flattered himself that he had succeeded. He was quite unaware that Guy, though wondering at his curiosity, was responding to his advances in furtherance of his own objects. Guy talked freely of his boyhood. He spoke with filial affection of his father, and of the mother he could just remember, and as he revealed the particulars of his parentage Captain Marven's half-formed hopes withered, and he told himself that his expectancy had given to the young man a family likeness which had no existence outside his own imagination. So the train rushed on through the night, bearing father and son sitting face to face, yet unrevealed; and while the son plotted to rob his father of the despatches which honour bade him guard with his life, the father looked at him again and again, saddened with the thought of another hope shattered.

The train sped on, stopping now and again to pick up the mails. Conversation languished. Guy had decided on his course of action. He determined to try a plan which, if unsuccessful, would leave him

time for a second attempt, a plan the feasibility of which he had frequently discussed with his mentor, Lynton Hora.

He surprised Captain Marven in a yawn. "Getting sleepy?" he asked.

Marven smiled. "I don't sleep to-night until my journey is ended."

"What martyrdom to duty," scoffed Guy. "I am almost inclined to save you from yourself."

Marven looked at him questioningly.

"By demonstrating the power of hypnotism," explained Guy briefly.

"Oh!" Captain Marven laughed. "I am afraid you would not find me an amenable subject," he said.

"I don't know," replied Guy. "It is astonishingly easy to induce hypnotic sleep."

Marven smiled doubtingly. He held the belief that hypnotism was a mere vulgar device of charlatans to impose upon the gullible. He expounded his views to Guy at length. The young man, stimulating opposition by assertion and counter-assertion, at last declared that if Captain Marven would only lend himself to the experiment he would speedily prove to his satisfaction that there were substantial grounds for belief in the reality of hypnotic force. Captain Marven, serenely satisfied of his invulnerability and amused at Guy's obstinacy, professed his willingness to submit to any experiment Guy might suggest. Guy appeared

to hesitate at the prompt acceptance. He declared that he was unprovided with the necessary materials. Marven chaffed him, seeing in his reluctance doubt in his own beliefs. Guy remembered that he had in his handbag a small electric torch with a reflector attached, which might serve the purpose of the mesmeric disc usually used. He produced it.

Marven, lounging comfortably in his corner, was bidden to divest his mind of all thought and to gaze intently upon the glowing point of light. With a keen sense of the absurdity of the proceeding the King's messenger conscientiously endeavoured to obey the instructions given him. Silence reigned in the compartment for two, three, four minutes. Then Guy rose from his corner and stood over his companion, every nerve quivering with the intensity of his purpose. He laid his hand lightly on Marven's head.

"You are beginning to feel sleepy," he said.

Marven did not contradict him. Already his brain had wandered far afield from the thoughts which had employed it when he had first fixed his gaze on the brilliant point of light. He had forgotten that he was the subject of an experiment. He was dreaming again, dreaming that his son was found, and that they were going home together. It was such a pleasant dream that he would not raise his eyes lest it should be shattered, as such dreams had always been shattered before. Perhaps he was feeling sleepy. Well, what

of it? Surely there was no reason why he should not sleep.

"You are feeling very sleepy," said Guy. He was watching Marven's eyes closely, and observed that their lids drooped heavily.

"You will not keep awake much longer," he said.

The point of light seemed suddenly enlarged. It filled Marven's field of vision. No, he would not be able to keep awake much longer.

"Yes, I am very sleepy," he replied. The voice was mechanical.

Guy's heart bounded triumphantly. His experiment was succeeding beyond his wildest anticipations. At the most he had hoped to be able to gain the opportunity to instil a suggestion into a half-drugged consciousness which would facilitate his obtaining possession of the despatches; but now it seemed that he was on the point of entirely subjugating his companion's consciousness.

"You must close your eyes," he said.

Marven obeyed.

"Stand up," commanded Guy.

Marven raised himself to his feet, but his eyes remained closed.

"You cannot lift your right arm," said Guy.

Some remnant of will yet remained. The hypnotized man strove to raise his arm; but the effort was a failure, the arm, half lifted from the elbow, dropped again.

"Sit down and sleep comfortably until I awaken you," commanded Guy.

Marven obeyed. He lay back in his corner. His eyes were closed, his breathing calm and even. To all appearances he was asleep. Guy reseated himself and gazed at the man opposite. Was his experiment indeed successful, or was Marven merely shamming with a view of ridiculing his efforts? He inclined to the former belief; yet the ease with which Marven had succumbed was in itself suspicious. It would be easy to apply a test.

Guy rose and, drawing aside the overcoat which Marven wore, deliberately unbuckled the strap upon which the despatch-case was slung. The Captain never stirred. He was really asleep. Guy looked at his watch. In another ten minutes the train would be stopping at Cambridge. Yes, he had just time to carry out the initial stage of his plan. From his hand-bag he produced a mass of stiff modelling clay, and with it he took two impressions of the seals which secured the fastenings of the case. Then he placed the case and the impressions in his own bag. Already he was beginning to enjoy the consciousness of success.

The train ran into Cambridge railway station. Guy leaned over his sleeping companion.

"You must have a cup of coffee if you are to keep awake," he said.

The Captain's eyes opened, but they were dull, unseeing.

The train stopped. Guy alighted, and Marven followed him to the refreshment-room. Guy ordered coffee. Marven drank his mechanically.

"We must return," said Guy. "The coffee will not keep you awake long."

The guard was standing at the door when they re-entered their compartment, and he closed it deferentially. Evidently he was aware of Captain Marven's identity. Guy was glad that he had taken the risk of awakening Marven, otherwise the railway official's acquaintance might have proved troublesome.

The train rolled out again into the night.

"You will sleep again," said Guy soothingly.

The Captain composed himself in his corner and Guy forgot him. Seconds only passed before the despatch-case was open before him, seals broken, lock picked, and the papers it contained lying in his hand. He groaned as he saw the voluminous character of the document. Then his eyes brightened as he caught sight of a précis of the contents attached. A fountain-pen and paper were at his hand, and a copy of the précis was soon in his possession. Then, watch in hand, he read the more lengthy despatch. Ten minutes had passed since leaving Cambridge, and another ten would bring the train to Ely. He returned the papers to the case. With deftness born of much practice the lock was turned again. With a spirit lamp the wax of the seals was melted and the seal reimpressed by aid

of the carefully oiled clay impression, already hardened sufficiently for the purpose. With a sigh of satisfaction Guy laid the case on the seat. But the sigh died away. Looking up he was astounded to find that Captain Marven had awakened, and was standing erect, and with outstretched hand was pointing to the case.

There came upon Guy the impulse for instant flight. But whither? The impulse did not remain long in possession of him. He saw that Marven was striving to speak and could not find words, and at the same moment he realized that his victim was only partially awakened from the hypnotic state. Collecting all his faculties for a supreme effort Guy faced him.

"You cannot stand up," he said. "You cannot awaken for two minutes yet."

The Captain hesitated. He seemed to be fighting against an overpowering desire. But insistently Guy repeated his commands, and with a despairing gesture Marven sank back once again into his corner.

Guy waited no longer. The moment Marven was quiescent he rebuckled the case to the strap and disposed it beneath the Captain's coat. Then he clapped his hands smartly before the sleeping man's face and cried loudly, "Wake up, Captain Marven, wake up!"

Marven came back gradually from his trance. He rubbed his eyes, he looked wonderingly about him.

"What have you to say about hypnotism now?" asked Guy.

Captain Marven looked puzzled.

"I—I don't quite understand. Do you mean to say that I have slept?"

The train ran into Ely station.

"Hullo! where are we? At Cambridge already?" asked Marven.

Guy laughed. "This is Ely," he answered.

"Ely?" repeated the Captain incredulously.

"Yes, Ely," answered Guy. "Don't you remember stopping at Cambridge and going with me to the refreshment-room for a cup of coffee to keep you awake?"

"Stopping at Cambridge!" repeated Marven, more incredulously than before.

"It is a fact," answered Guy, and he added, "I hope you will forgive me having given you so practical an exposition of the fact that there is something in hypnotism after all."

Captain Marven did not answer immediately. He seemed to be struggling for recollection. "I have no remembrance of that, but——" By an instinctive gesture his hand sought the case beneath his coat. His face lightened as he felt it there. "I've been dreaming, nevertheless," he said. "I seem to remember that something in my charge was in your possession, and that although I struggled to regain possession of it I could not do so."

"I suppose it was the last impulse of your will to combat the effort I was making to gain control of it," remarked Guy, secretly congratulating himself on the fact that he had been in time to prevent Marven's complete awakening before the case had been returned to him.

"No doubt that is the explanation," replied Marven, rising and throwing open the carriage door. He stepped on to the platform.

"Are you not going to stretch your legs, Hora?" he asked. "We have twenty minutes here."

Guy joined him and they paced the platform together. They chatted on indifferent topics. Then Captain Marven suddenly sprang a personal question.

"By the way, Hora," he said, "if it's not impertinent to ask, what made you choose this infernally slow train to come to this part of the world?"

Guy had long had a lie prepared.

"Laziness," he answered lightly. "I missed the earlier one, which would have taken me on to Hunstanton, where I have an appointment to-morrow morning. I found that I should be able to get on from Lynn in time to keep it, and so here I am. I'm glad I missed the fast train as it has happened. I hate travelling alone."

Captain Marven made no reply. Guy could see that he was not satisfied, but he gave no hint that he had observed anything; and when the journey was re-

sumed he kept up an easy flow of talk until Lynn was reached.

There he bade Captain Marven good-bye, and if the King's messenger had any suspicion regarding the companion of his journey, there was no hint of it conveyed in his parting greeting.

CHAPTER VII

MERIEL MAKES AN IMPRESSION

CAPTAIN MARVEN was certainly not at ease in his own mind in regard to the experience on his journey. He seemed to remember awakening and seeing in Guy's possession the despatch-box that he carried. Yet, in view of the fact that it was still buckled to the strap, the suspicion seemed absurd. As soon as he was alone he carefully examined the despatch-case. The seals were to all appearances intact. He missed none of his personal belongings, and was ashamed of the suspicion which prompted his hurried search through his pockets. Really he had no reason to suspect Guy Hora of any ulterior object in hypnotizing him. He recalled all the circumstances. At his own invitation Guy had travelled with him, he himself had pressed his companion to make the experiment. He had lost consciousness while Guy was sitting opposite him, and when he had regained it Guy was still opposite him, and certainly did not exhibit the slightest trace of trepidation. But what had happened in the forty minutes' interval

which had elapsed between the losing and regaining of consciousness. Guy had told him that they had alighted at Cambridge and had drunk a cup of coffee at the refreshment-room. But was that all? He could not banish the thought of the dream which had come to him during that hypnotic slumber, the vision of Guy Hora bending over the despatch-case doing something to the seals, and of himself standing powerless to interfere with him. Was it only a dream? Yet it were foolish to suppose otherwise. What could the despatches he carried contain of interest to the wealthy young man about town, who seemed to him so like what his own son might have been? It was a puzzle which he could not elucidate, though it engaged his attention during his long motor drive to the royal residence; it was present in his thoughts when he placed the case in the hands of the Secretary of State, who, warned by telegraph of his coming, was waiting up for him; and he could not escape it even when he himself sought repose. It was the first thought in his mind when he awoke the next morning.

If he had been gifted with clairvoyant powers he would not have needed to flog his brains for a solution. Could he have seen Lynton Hora gloating over the transcription of the cipher telegram which had reached him that morning from Guy, Captain Marven would have had an inkling of the truth. Could he later have seen Lynton Hora sending off wires to brokers at

Paris, Berlin, and New York; could he have heard Lynton Hora instructing his London stockbroker over the telephone, he would have been still nearer a solution. Finally, could he have heard the Foreign Secretary's remarks later in the day when a detailed account of an unfortunate incident in the South Pacific, in which a German gunboat and a British cruiser were concerned, appeared in an evening paper, he would have known that in some mysterious manner the information contained in the despatches he had carried had become known to the world.

Yet though he knew not, nor could have known, any of these things, yet the vague uneasiness that there had been intention in Guy's presence on the train was not easily dispelled. It begot in him a still greater desire to learn something more of the young man whose face haunted his thoughts, and when he returned to town the next morning, carrying with him the answers to the stolen despatches, it was with the fixed intention of cultivating Guy's acquaintance, if the opportunity offered.

The chance he desired was not long presenting itself. A week had not elapsed before they met again. The meeting was a purely casual one. They recognized each other at the opera. Guy occupied a stall, and the Captain was with his wife and niece in a box. At the end of the first act Guy left his seat. The Captain met him in the foyer.

"Been trying any more experiments in hypnotism?" was Marven's greeting.

Guy shook his head and laughed. "I haven't been upon any railway journeys with unbelievers," he replied jestingly. He met the Captain's glance fearlessly, and again Marven felt ashamed of his suspicions.

"I was just coming to pay my respects to Mrs. Marven and Miss Challis," continued Guy.

The Captain turned to accompany him. "You need not tell the ladies how easily you bowled me out," he remarked. "I have been so blatantly cynical on the subject always that I should never hear the last of it."

"Why, certainly not," answered Guy, smiling. The Captain's attitude dispelled the last chance of his being connected in any way with the acquisition of the information which, when it had been made public, had created the most intense excitement. Clearly the Captain wished no one to know that he had allowed himself to be placed in a hypnotic trance while on duty; and Guy, for his own protection, was more than ready to fall in with the suggestion to keep silence concerning the episode.

"After all, it is a purely personal matter of absolutely no concern to any one but our two selves," he added as they reached the box.

Conveying his thanks with a nod, Marven opened the door, and as Guy entered all thought of the Cap-

tain passed from his mind. Only once previously had he met Meriel Challis, but the impression which she had produced upon him was one that would not easily be eradicated. He had first seen her floating towards him on some booby's arm at Lady Greyston's dance. Who the booby was and what the booby looked like Guy had not the faintest idea. He had no time to spare a glance for any one else, once his eyes had rested on her face. But the man on whose arm she leaned so lightly must of necessity be a booby. Any mere man could be nothing but a booby in comparison with any personality so exquisitely ethereal as that given by nature to Meriel Challis. Guy had determined to take the place of that booby himself. He had inquired amongst his friends until he had obtained the introduction he desired. He had received one waltz and he had sat out one square dance in the plumbago bower at the end of the long gallery. He would never forget the fair picture she made, draped in maiden garb of white, her dazzling skin and hair framed in the tender blues of the drooping blossoms. It had been an effort for him to speak to so distractingly beautiful a subject, and it had been only the fear lest she should think him moonstruck which had forced him to unlock his lips. No wonder that the despoiling of Mr. Fleurscheim's treasure-house had been postponed. Indeed, had the treasures been spread before him at that moment Guy would have passed them by unnoticed.

That first impression of instinctive reverence had not endured. A fervid disciple of Hora's cynical philosophy could not remain for long in a state of ecstatic adoration of one of the sex provided for the relaxation of the warrior.

But now, entering again into her presence, his first impression was revived with redoubled intensity. Again he saw her coming towards him. He remembered the Tennysonian line which flashed into his memory at first sight of her—

Robed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.

No, that did not do justice to Meriel Challis, and yet it might perchance describe her in some moods, he thought, and though there was nothing mystic in her mood when Guy had been introduced, yet the swift impression was mayhap nearer the truth than the later one.

Mrs. Marven greeted him warmly. They chatted a little while, then, as Guy turned to the girl, she became a silent observer. The family likeness which her husband had observed in Guy was equally apparent to herself, but she had not given words to the vague thoughts which had risen up in her mind when she had first seen him at Lady Greyston's dance. Such thoughts were best crushed down at once, they only invited disillusionment. Not for worlds would she have suggested to her husband that the young man had awakened in her the crushed down maternal

instinct. The mere hint would have made him uneasy. She even dreaded lest he should have recognized for himself certain physical resemblances which certainly existed between her husband and Guy. She had no idea that he had recognized them, and she was as loath as her husband himself to give words to her imaginings for precisely the same reasons which imposed silence upon him. Each, in point of fact, had felt the promptings of the parental instinct, and each, in tenderness for the partner of his and of her sorrows and joys, forbore to awaken by a word the memory of the great sorrow which had early cast its cloud over their married life.

Lynton Hora had always been hopelessly wrong when he had imagined that but for the rivalry of Marven he would have won the affection of Beatrice Challis. So far as he was concerned she had always been heart-whole. But from the day she had met Dick Marven there had only been one mate for her in the whole wide world. The affection had been mutually bestowed. Marven lived for his wife even as she lived for him. In each of their thoughts the one object for consideration was their *alter ego*. Marven would have sacrificed anything to save his wife a momentary pang, physical or mental. She would have inflicted any torture upon herself that he might be spared even momentary uneasiness. But this kindly consideration for each other's feelings did not

always prove unexceptionable in practice. Impalpable, diaphanous, there was a barrier of reserve ever between them from the day their firstborn and only child had been mysteriously spirited away. In so far Hora's scheme for revenge had been successful in action. It had shadowed the lives of both the parties upon whom his blow had fallen, and though in tender consideration for each other his action had brought them closer together, yet it had also operated in placing between them the barrier of a subject they dared not discuss.

The maternal instinct, deprived of its natural outlet, of necessity had found another vent. Robbed of her son, Mrs. Marven had taken to her heart a brother's child who had been orphaned early in life. The girl had repaid the devotion lavished upon her, and if Mrs. Marven could never quite banish the regret for her lost son, she would always have heartily admitted that Meriel Challis had brought bright sunshine again into her life. Meriel was all that a daughter could be, and a very tender sympathy existed between her and her aunt.

Naturally the latter could not have failed to observe the admiration which Guy Hora exhibited towards Meriel. It was patent in his every glance, and he made no effort to conceal it. He approached Meriel with the proud assurance of the man who feels that he has the right to lay the tribute of his admiration at the feet of the woman whom he admires, and is

not ashamed of letting the whole world perceive upon whom his choice had fallen.

Mrs. Marven liked the attitude, which was so different to that of many of the admirers whom Meriel had already, in the course of her first season, gathered in her train. It awakened memories, too, of the days when James Marven had wooed her. His face had worn the same unconscious air of adoration. Almost Mrs. Marven's heart stood still as she watched Guy's face as he stood leaning forward looking into Meriel's eyes, answering her smiles with his own, the likeness was so vivid to the memory she bore in her heart. She would have liked to step forward and claim him. Her heart cried out, "My son, my son!" but the words died on her lips. She crushed them back, though the effort left her lips pale.

Meriel, looking towards her, noticed the pallor, and with a hasty "You are ill, auntie," was at her side.

"I find the theatre a little close," murmured Mrs. Marven. "If we might have the door of the box open a little." She refused all suggestions that they should leave the opera house, and before the attempts to persuade her were completed the curtain was rung up, the lights were lowered, and the opera proceeded.

Guy remained in the box. Mrs. Marven sat back in the shadow studying his face intently. When the second act ended she had regained full control of her

emotions and could make light of the supposed indisposition with which she had apparently been attacked. She pressed Guy to remain in the box for the rest of the evening, and he was nothing loath to accept the invitation.

There, then, he remained, unconscious that he was the centre of interest to the two elder members of the party, unstirred by any instinctive emotion towards them, and with every thought, every faculty, strained to make the most of the flying minutes which gave him Meriel's company. He was unable to solace himself with the assurance that she responded to the emotions which were aroused in himself by her presence. She was purely natural, no spice of affectation spoiled her glance or her smile. Indeed, at times she seemed to be unconscious even of his existence, enthralled in the melody of the music, responsive only to the rhythm of the throbbing strings. Guy could hardly understand her rapture. "Romeo et Juliette," even with world-famed artists to sing the title-rôles, had already ceased to awaken him to passionate wonder. The *naïveté* of the girl's enjoyment surprised him, and he wished that she might for once have forgotten the music for him.

Yet if he had possessed the power to peer into the girl's heart Guy would have found that his own image was already stamped there; that it was his presence which was the inspiration to enjoy; that unknowingly, imperceptibly, the tiny seed of love had been planted

in her maiden bosom, needing but the passage of the hours before it should spring up into the perfect plant of a pure woman's first love. But though Meriel knew not of the implantation, she was conscious of the additional thrill in her delight. The whole world was now become perfect to her. She thought the sense of beatitude was the product of the sensuous melody of the opera.

There was no discordant note anywhere. The evening promised to pass in joy unalloyed. A fly dropped into the ointment. She looked up and met the glance of Hildebrand Flurscheim. To her it was at first the mere casual glance of a complete stranger from a near box; but there was something compelling in it. When she glanced in his direction again he was still gazing steadily at her. She drew herself back into the shadow. But the exhilaration of spirit had passed. She felt compelled to look again in the direction of the stranger. He was still watching. When the act was ended she turned almost petulantly to Guy.

"Can you tell me who that man is—the Jew staring at us so persistently from the fifth box on the right?" she asked.

Guy glanced in the direction she indicated, but before he answered Captain Marven spoke.

"The fifth?" he said. "That's Flurscheim, the chap who lost the Greuze the other day. It's reported," he added meditatively, "that he has sworn that he

will devote the whole of the rest of his life if necessary to tracking down the rascal who has robbed him of his picture."

There was a smile on Guy's face as he answered, "He doesn't expect to find it at Covent Garden, does he?"

Despite the smile, however, he was conscious of a vague sense of uneasiness at the persistent scrutiny which Flurscheim was bestowing upon the box. There are times when the fear of being found out bears a marvellous similarity to the prickings of conscience, and certain inward twitches which he felt made him supremely uncomfortable. Hitherto he had always been able to justify his actions by means of Lynton Hora's philosophy, but now he realized in a flash that he would no longer be satisfied by justification in his own eyes. Could he justify his deeds to the satisfaction of the pure-browed girl by whose side he stood? Would she accept the doctrine that since virtue consisted in a thirst for danger and a courage for the forbidden, the highest virtue was to be found in the breaking of laws? He knew instinctively that she would not, that in her eyes he would appear no heroic figure engaged in single combat against a host of enemies, but the despicable figure—a furtive, cringing, creeping figure—the despicable figure of the thief.

He left the box with his thoughts in a turmoil. He scarcely observed the particular warmth of the fare-

wells with which both Mrs. Marven and Captain Marven took leave of him. He hardly noticed that Meriel's hand had lingered a moment in his grasp. He felt that he must be assured that Flurscheim had not been watching him.

CHAPTER VIII

A SUCCESSFUL SPECULATION AND ITS RESULTS

LYNTON HORA felt that Fate had dealt generously with him when it had made Captain Marven the bearer of the despatch-case which Guy had so ingeniously rifled of its secrets. Guy's success had supplied him with all the information necessary to bring off a magnificent coup on the Stock Exchange. He had speculated heavily for the fall in the securities of both countries. He knew that publication of the information he had in his possession would make his operation successful. He had not scrupled to publish that information, though its disclosure before its discussion between the chancellories of the two great nations concerned brought two great powers to the verge of war.

It found its way into the newspapers, and while the Press of two countries breathed defiance Hora laughed in his sleeve, cynically declaring that no farce is equal to the farce of civilization, since nations are as ready to fly at each other's throats as any street curs. And while the newspapers snarled and patriots in beerhouses and at street corners sang national

anthems, Hora watched the prices of securities, and when the crisis reached its acutest stage, he bought in his bear, and found himself possessed of what to the majority of men would have been a sufficient provision against the future.

But Guy's successful action had done more than lead to the swift accumulation of a fortune. Hora had not for a moment anticipated the long arm of coincidence would be stretched to such purpose as to make the father the bearer of the despatches which the son had stolen. It was the crowning stone in the carefully built arch which was to bear the superstructure of his revenge.

Hora felt almost superstitiously inclined regarding the coincidence. He did not learn of the identity of the messenger until Guy's return from Lynn, and as soon as it was made known to him he saw how the fact could be made to serve his purpose. Naturally he said nothing of that ulterior purpose to either Guy or to Myra. He was merely full of praises for his pupil. He declared himself to be so satisfied that he expressed his intention of making the young man master of his own actions for the future. "You have enabled me to provide for myself, Guy," he said. "It is now my turn to provide for you, so that if at any time you desire to retire from your profession you will be at liberty to do so."

Guy had ridiculed the suggestion, but Hora had insisted. "Who knows what may happen in the

future ? " he said. " It will be well for you to have money at your own disposal. You may quarrel with me. To-day sons always quarrel with their fathers. Sometimes they rob them, and if fathers were wise they would always see that their sons are spared the necessity."

Guy laughed. He felt that he was not of the commonplace world of sons who robbed their fathers, but he gave way to Hora's whim. He instructed a broker on his own account, though the operation was not in his own name. Hora had suggested that it would be just as well if for the occasion Guy borrowed another surname. So the letter of introduction he forwarded to Hora's broker introduced " my young friend Guy Marven, upon whose information I am acting, and who, wishing to speculate on his own account, I am prepared to guarantee up to £10,000." Accordingly it was as Guy Marven that he signed in due course the transfer notes of stock which came to hand ; it was with the name of Guy Marven that he endorsed the cheque which he paid into his own banking account as the result of the speculation.

He had wondered that Hora should have selected the name of Marven, and had even suggested the inadvisability of making use of it, since Jones, Brown, or Robinson would have been equally useful if the necessity existed to use another than his own. To him it seemed that the use of the name Marven might excite remark. " Exactly why I wish you to use it,"

Hora had answered. "If any one who was aware that Marven carried those despatches should hear that a Marven had been speculating for the fall, it would not be remarkable if they should arrive at the conclusion that he had looked inside his case himself."

"That seems rather rough on Captain Marven," remarked Guy. It seemed a mean deed, and Hora had not trained him to take a delight in mean deeds.

"Isn't he my enemy, and therefore yours? You have no reason, I suppose, for treating him with more consideration than all the rest of the world?" demanded Hora.

Guy did not answer. He was tempted to reply with a direct "no," but he had never yet lied to Hora. Yet he could not bring himself to confide to the Commendatore the reason why he would have extended consideration to Captain Marven. He had no wish to hear the Commendatore's biting cynicisms applied personally to Meriel. The idea seemed sacrilegious. He was relieved to find that Hora made no comment on this silence. But the Commendatore had not failed to observe it, and remembering at the same time how Guy had nearly let slip the opportunity for securing the Greuze in the seductive companionship of these same "pleasant people," he realized that the time had come for him to discover what the attraction was. Of course he guessed. The miniature set in the snuff-box which Guy had expressed a desire to retain had not escaped his notice.

"The inevitable feminine," he said sneeringly to himself. But he knew that the inevitable feminine has always to be reckoned with where a young man is concerned, and generally where an old man is concerned also. It behoved him to know something of this new factor, which might materially affect his plans. But Guy must have no suspicion that he was under observation. Hora's mind jumped to an expedient whereby his object would be secured without subjecting himself to inconvenience. He determined to make the suggestion which had occurred to him forthwith.

"There's another matter which I have been giving thought to, Guy. Don't you think that it is about time you took some chambers for yourself?"

Guy was more than startled by the suggestion thus sprung upon him. He had always been left such perfect freedom that there had never been the slightest temptation in the thought of possessing a domicile of his own.

"Why, Commendatore?" he asked. "I am perfectly comfortable at home here."

"You will always be at home here, I hope," replied Hora; "but at the same time there is much to be said in favour of the course I am proposing. Now listen, Guy. I will say nothing of the extra freedom which will be yours."

"I could not have more than I enjoy at present," remarked Guy.

Hora shrugged his shoulders. "Men are men," he said. "You may be having visitors who might hardly like to come here. Eh?"

Guy smiled.

"I see it is possible," continued Hora, smiling in his turn. "Then there are others whom I might not wish to meet. The men of your own years with whom you mix, with whom you must mix if you are to keep your position, will probably be often dropping in on you. I am getting of an age, Guy, when I might find their presence—I will not say distasteful, but just a little wearisome. At chambers of your own you will be much freer in that respect."

"There are my clubs," objected Guy.

Hora waved the objection aside.

"Then there is the additional reason of our joint safety to be considered," continued Hora meditatively. "It seems to me that if you are located in a place of your own we shall be provided with another strategic centre from which to carry on operations. You see it might be important for the safety of both or either of us that we should not be living under the same roof."

"Certainly I see your point there," replied Guy, and he became thoughtful.

"Think it over, Guy," said Hora, and he left the young man.

Guy thought it over, and was surprised when he did so that the idea proved so attractive. It was not

that he was ungrateful. He could not believe that the daily companionship of Hora was becoming distasteful, and yet there was certainly relief in the thought that he should be apart from the man whom he called father. How greatly this thought was due to the impression that Meriel Challis had produced upon him he did not appreciate, but the knowledge that if he were settled in a home of his own he might perhaps escape taking part in any plans for revenge which Hora might be weaving about Captain Marven was certainly a powerful consideration.

When therefore Hora broached the subject again after dinner that night, Guy was quite prepared, nay, even eager, to fall in with his views. Hora was more than ever convinced that some unknown factor was influencing his adopted son.

The only voice raised in protest was Myra's.

"You—you are going away? Why?" she asked.

There was a tremor in her voice which made Hora intervene hastily.

"It is my wish, Myra," he said. The woman shivered at the menace of his tone. But it produced the result Hora desired. She quelled the emotion which struggled for utterance, and listened in silence while Hora reiterated the reasons which he had already given to Guy.

But though dumbly acquiescent she did not believe in Hora's statement as to the motives which animated him, and when, after Guy had left them, she

was alone with Hora, she returned again to the subject.

"Why are you sending Guy away?" she asked. "Is it to avert danger from yourself?" There was scorn in her tone. Hora made no attempt to avert the threatened emotional storm.

"Have I ever feared danger?" he asked sneeringly.

"I've never known you to face it. I don't know anything about your feelings," she replied.

Hora looked at her. She had never dared so to speak to him before, and he knew that she must be greatly moved so to provoke his anger.

"You know nothing," he replied calmly. "A woman is utterly unable to comprehend a masculine point of view."

"A woman cannot live in the same house with a man and fail to know something of his character, and I know something of yours, Commendatore."

He shrugged his shoulders in amused surprise.

"You find me an interesting study, Myra?" he drawled.

He could not have said anything more calculated to arouse Myra's tempestuous spirit.

"Interesting?" she exclaimed. "I don't know about that. You don't interest me in the least. I—I—hate you."

"Dear me!" replied Hora equably. "I might have expected you to do so. Perhaps I have, for there's

undoubtedly wisdom in the suggestion that one does not pluck figs from thistles, though the saying is somewhat hackneyed."

"You need not throw my origin in my teeth, Commendatore," she replied. "I am sufficiently conscious of it. And as for gratitude—well, I often think I should have been far better off in the slums from which you picked me. I should have been happy enough. The precious education you have given me has only enabled me to realize my own impossibility. You have given me knowledge and with it the capacity for suffering."

"Like your mother, Eve," responded Hora quietly, "you longed for the apple and blame the serpent."

"Eve was no child, and I was a child when you gave me the apple," she answered more quietly.

"That is true," replied Hora. "Possibly I did wrongly. I should have left you to bloom in your own soil. You would have been overblown by this time, Myra—some drunken ruffian's doxy—taking your weekly beating without a whimper and seeing heaven in a quartern of gin."

"Better that—better that—than——" She paused.

"Well?" asked Hora. She muttered something sullenly, but in so low a tone that the words did not reach his ears. He continued, "You were asking me why I think it well that Guy should have a home of his own. I have given you my reasons. I really

should have thought you were intelligent enough to realize their force."

"I don't believe in them!" she flashed out. "Oh! I know you better than that, Commendatore. I know your subtle methods. You have some other end in view. What it is I know not, but I am sure it means danger to Guy." She had been moving restlessly backwards and forwards, but now she paused and faced Hora. "I tell you, Commendatore, that if anything happens to Guy you shall not escape. I swear it."

Despite his apparent unconcern Hora was impressed by the latent passion in her tone. Almost he regretted that he had not left the beautiful flower to be choked by the weeds from which he had plucked it. But he remembered that he had one means of controlling Myra which would necessarily prove effective. He rose from the chair where he had been sitting. "If anything happens to Guy I don't suppose I shall care much what happens to myself," he replied gravely. "Is he not my son?"

"Your son?" replied Myra. "I doubt it, Commendatore. No father would ever have brought up a son as you have brought up Guy. Besides, there is nothing of you in him. I know you both. There's not a feature alike, and the difference between your thoughts and actions and his is just as strongly marked."

"You are talking nonsense, Myra," he said harshly,

far more perturbed than he cared to confess at the discovery by which the woman's intuition had arrived at the truth.

"You may call it nonsense," she continued wildly, "but there's no blood of yours in Guy's veins——"

Hora checked her. He laid his hand on her shoulder, and though she made an effort to throw off his grip, he held her tightly and thrust her down into an easy chair.

"You little fool," he said, "you don't know what you are talking about. Like all women in love, you let your imagination run away with you."

She still struggled ineffectually to escape from his grasp, while he continued, "Suppose I had other motives than those I have given to you and Guy for desiring that he should live apart from us for a little while, have I ever, by any chance, done anything which could bring danger upon him? Did it never occur to you that one of my motives had connection with yourself?"

She ceased to struggle. Her hands dropped limply by her side.

"I might have known, I might have known," she cried; "and yet, Commendatore, you promised me that I should have my chance."

Hora saw that he had won the battle. He loosed his grip of Myra's arm and returned to his chair.

The girl rose, and, following him, dropped on her knees before him. The tears were in her eyes, and

her bosom rose and fell stormily. "You promised me I should have my chance, Commendatore. Don't send Guy away. I cannot bear it. Indeed—indeed, I cannot bear it." Sobs choked her utterance.

Hora allowed her to weep awhile, then he laid his hand gently on her bowed head.

"Poor little woman," he said. "If you could only see an inch beyond your own nose you would realize that I am giving you your chance now."

She looked up incredulously, but with a dawning hope flushing through her tears. "I don't understand how——" she began.

"You have been too near to Guy," he remarked. "He has never realized your value. At a little distance he will be more clear-sighted. A woman is like any other work of art—her beauties are invisible unless seen in proper perspective. While you live in the same house he will never realize that you may be more than a sister."

"Then you think——?" she asked.

"I am sure of it," replied Hora decisively. "It is to give you the chance you desire that I have persuaded Guy to live apart from us awhile, for that and in order to discover something about a rival whom I suspect you may have."

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING A GREAT MAN'S VEXATION

WHEN the carriage containing the Great Man rolled up to the door on the south side of Downing Street the constable stationed there stiffened himself preparatory to saluting. But his salute passed unnoticed. The door swung open, but the commissionaire got not so much as a glance.

"There's trouble brewin' in China," said the worthy hall-porter to his circle of cronies that same evening in the private bar of the "Lord Palmerston," "you mark my words if there isn't."

"More likely to be with Germany. That's the right place to look for trouble," asserted one of the listeners.

"Of course, you would know better than me," replied the worthy janitor. "You read the papers every day, so you can't be wrong." There was unutterable scorn in his tone as he referred to the Press.

"And what's wrong with the papers?" inquired the interlocutor in an aggrieved voice. "I suppose they know as much about things as you do, any day."

The commissionaire pursed his lips, blew his nose, and finished his beer before he found words to convey his answer.

"The newspapers! The newspapers are common liars!" he answered, "and ought to be hanged as such. No, don't you go for to speak up for 'em, George Jenkins; we know all about the papers in our department."

Jenkins did not subside immediately.

"I presume Sir Gadsby takes you into 'is confidence —not to say asks your advice occasional?" he asked sarcastically.

"He might do worse than ask the advice of a man who's fought in hall four quarters of the globe and 'as the right to wear six medals and twelve bars," interrupted another listener propitiatingly.

"So he might," replied the commissionaire, smiling genially; "but that's neither here nor there. If you want to know why I say it's China, I don't mind telling you." He glanced round to see that no outsiders were within earshot and dropped his voice into a confidential whisper.

"Four Secretaries have I known since I went to our place, and I studies 'em until I comes to read 'em like books, and Sir Gadsby Dimbleby is one of the easiest volumes I've ever had to study. I know 'is German face and 'is Russian face as well as I know my own. This morning when he come in I could read China in 'is heye as plain as if it were in the biggest print.

You mark my words, there's trouble brewin' in China."

The oracle had spoken, and, as is often the case with oracles which have not been primed with facts, the utterance was as wide of the mark as it could well be.

Sir Gadsby Dimbleby's brain had not been occupied in the least degree with Chinese affairs as he passed the portals of the Foreign Office. He was troubling about something which had happened much nearer home, a subject which had been pigeon-holed in one of the compartments of his brain until the crisis in the relations with Germany, caused by the premature disclosure of the unfortunate incident in the South Seas, should have passed. That storm had been safely weathered, and H.M. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs bethought himself of the promise he had made to himself to discover how the information had leaked out. To him it seemed uncommonly like treachery on the part of some one, and being by birth, education, and natural instinct a thorough English gentleman, the idea of even having to suspect any one in the great department of which he was the head of treachery was odious to him. So the Great Man passed, heedless of the salutes of officials, to the innermost sanctum, where the Permanent Secretary sat with his fingers on the strings which directed British policy all over the world, peacefully enjoying a matutinal cigar while glancing over the précis of a verbose despatch, pre-

pared by his own secretary, from the governor of a wind-swept rock in the South Atlantic, concerning the deadly damage likely to be done to British interests by ceasing to imprison a garrison in such an out-of-the-way spot.

The Permanent Secretary looked up as the Great Man entered and wondered. He was at a loss to understand the reason for the knitted brow. The political horizon was clear, and nothing could happen without his knowledge. He guessed that the reason was domestic. He knew that Lady Gadsby had a will of her own, and that even Great Men are human enough to be annoyed by feminine displeasure.

But Sir Gadsby soon undeceived him. He fidgeted about uncomfortably for a minute or two, irritably asking questions about minor matters which had recently engaged his attention, before he plunged into the subject which filled his thoughts.

"Look here, Markham," he said, "that German business in the South Pacific is still worrying me."

The Permanent Secretary looked at him in surprise. "There's no need to worry, Dimbleby," he answered; "that storm's blown over all right."

"That's not the point," snapped Sir Gadsby. "What I want to know is how that information leaked out in the newspapers. Have you any suspicions?"

The Great Man frowned at the Permanent Secretary and the Permanent Secretary frowned at the Great

Man. The Permanent Secretary was silent so long that the Great Man continued, "I hate to think that any of our people can have been so lost to all sense of decency and honour, yet what on earth can I think? You have told me yourself that our despatch must have been tapped somehow."

"I have puzzled over the matter as much as yourself," said the Permanent Secretary slowly, "and am as much at a loss as yourself to account for the information leaking out. It seems to me that there are only two persons whom it is possible to suspect."

"And those?" queried the Great Man eagerly.

"Are our own two selves," was the answer.

Despite his irritation, the Great Man laughed at the whimsicality of the idea, but he became grave again rapidly.

"If that's the case we must bring a different order of intelligence to bear upon the problem. What do you say to asking the assistance of Scotland Yard, Markham?"

"I've not much belief in Scotland Yard," replied the Permanent Secretary; "but still, there can be no harm in our giving them the opportunity of investigating the affair. They may discover a clue which will assist us in coming to some conclusion."

"Then send over a messenger at once, Markham," said the Great Man energetically. "I shall never feel safe if the contents of despatches are to leak out in this manner. Ask the Commissioner to send over

his most intelligent officer—no, ask them to send Kenly, I know he's got common sense—to make a delicate investigation. We will see him together."

Then he stalked off to his own room and worked off his irritation in preparing sarcastic answers to inconvenient questions in Parliament, of which notice had been given him by members of the Opposition party. Consequently he had recovered his accustomed urbanity when the Permanent Secretary, accompanied by Detective-Inspector Kenly, was ushered into his presence. He greeted the new-comer heartily.

"Glad the Commissioner could spare you, Kenly. There's nothing like having a man to undertake confidential work whom one knows from experience one can trust. I suppose Sir Everard Markham has told you what we want you to do?"

The Permanent Secretary interrupted with a hasty negative.

"Oh well, the matter will not take long to explain," continued the Great Man. "Correct me if I'm wrong, Markham."

The Permanent Secretary nodded and handed a cigar-case to the chief.

"Not before lunch," said the Great Man. He turned to the detective. "On the face of it the matter should prove a simple one, Kenly, but just at present it is beyond our combined intelligence to fathom it. Late on the fifteenth—a Tuesday, wasn't it, Markham?—a cipher cablegram containing important informa-

tion came into this office. The despatch was decoded——"

"By myself," interrupted the Permanent Secretary.

"Placed in a despatch-case, which was sealed in the usual way, and forwarded by King's messenger to me," continued Sir Gadsby. "I received the case, broke the seals myself, and retained the despatch in my own possession."

"Yes," said the detective as the Great Man paused.

"The despatch related to the recent trouble in the South Pacific, the German affair," remarked the Permanent Secretary, "and next morning there was wild excitement on the Stock Exchange, and later in the day the newspapers published full details of the trouble, much to our embarrassment."

"H'm," said the detective. "I suppose you want me to find out who gave the show away?"

"Your perspicuity is wonderful, Kenly," remarked the Great Man drily, and the Permanent Secretary smiled. "At present Markham, I know, suspects me of 'giving the show away,' as you put it, and if I didn't know Markham I should be compelled to suspect him. We are really the only two possible suspects."

"H'm," said the detective a second time before remarking deprecatingly, "the despatch passed through the hands of a third person—I think you mentioned a King's messenger?"

"I sealed the despatches with my own hands," remarked the Permanent Secretary.

"And the seals were intact when I took the case from Captain Marven's hands," added the Great Man.

The detective hazarded another suggestion—

"Is it quite impossible that the information might have reached the Stock Exchange and the newspapers from an external source?"

"So far as we can ascertain, quite impossible," replied the Permanent Secretary. "We have ascertained that no cable was received in London which could in any way have related to the affair before the publication of the news."

"It seems to us," said the Great Man briskly, "that even if we cannot get direct evidence as to the source through which the information leaked out, we should at least be able to come to some sort of conclusion if we knew the names of the parties who must have benefited by the Stock Exchange operations."

"I see," said the detective. "Well, Sir Gadsby, I'll do my best to find that out for you."

"I know you will, Kenly," said the Great Man. "But not a word to any one; and, while I think of it, I'll write a note to the Commissioner and ask him to allow you to report directly to Markham here, and to devote your whole time and attention to this business."

"Very good, Sir Gadsby," said the detective, and the interview ended.

When alone with the Permanent Secretary, Inspector Kenly asked every question which occurred to his active brain, but he elucidated nothing more than the very simple facts with which he had already been made acquainted, and when he left the Foreign Office it was with no very hopeful feeling of being able to lay his hand on the culprit. It is true that there had occurred to him the glimmering of a possibility as to who might have been responsible for the disclosure. The despatches had been in the possession of a third party—in the possession of Captain Marven, the King's messenger—for seven or eight hours, and Inspector Kenly had no particular reason for believing that official locks and seals were more inviolable than any other locks and seals if submitted to the gentle manipulation of an expert. But he had met Captain Marven in the course of his official life, and what he had seen of him led him to credit the reputation for perfect probity and honour which the King's messenger held in the eyes of the world.

"I should have liked an easier job," grumbled Inspector Kenly to himself; "another failure to find out anything coming on top of my failure to get the slightest clue to the mystery of the Flurscheim affair will make the chief think that I am getting past my work. However, it is no use worrying because I'm not possessed of the gift of divination. What is, was to be." With which philosophic reflection he stepped aboard a bus bound Citywards, and, while engaged

there in his investigations, the Great Man, having finished preparing his list of answers for the day's sitting of Parliament, carried off the Permanent Secretary to lunch with him. They enjoyed their meal none the less because they had unloaded the cause of their vexation upon the broad shoulders of Detective-Inspector Kenly.

CHAPTER X

A NEW VIEW OF THE FLURSCHEIM ROBBERY

TIME did not touch Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim's sore with a healing finger. A month after he had been robbed of his treasures the wound was still open, though by that time he had been wise enough to conceal it with a decent bandage from the curious eyes of the public. But his friends and his enemies knew that it was there, and condoled or rejoiced according to their several temperaments. Perhaps there were more who rejoiced than of those who pitied him, for Flurscheim was not a popular man. Even his friends were compelled to admit that he was something of a curmudgeon, and were not quite so sorry as they would have been had the loss fallen upon any one else.

After the robbery he became more curmudgeonish than ever, and his perpetual growlings at everything and everybody made him so undesirable a companion that even his poor relations began to find that his company was an infliction that was barely endurable, even when sweetened by the prospect of figuring in his will. Yet as people shrank from him he seemed

anxious for society. Partly because he realized that if he were cloistered with his own thoughts his broodings would terminate in madness, and partly because he wished to make clear to the world that his loss was a mere triviality to a man of his wealth, he sought to entertain in a manner which was entirely foreign to his earlier habit and his real desire. He had a wide acquaintance, and there were many of the butterflies of fashion and rank who were attracted to his dinner-table once by curiosity. If, after the experience, they decided not to go a second time, it was too early for the connoisseur to have discovered the fact. It was in pursuance of this campaign of distraction that he had found himself at the opera when his stare had proved so discomposing to Meriel Challis and—afterwards—to Guy. The latter, had he known, need have taken no alarm. Flurscheim's scrutiny was not directed towards him. Meriel's face alone had engaged his attention. He had first caught sight of her as she had bent forward to drink in the music, and he recognized that her features were familiar to him, but where and when he had met her he could not for the moment remember. It was not until after he had left the opera house that his memory supplied the answer he sought. Then he remembered that one of the stolen miniatures would have served as a portrait of the girl.

Immediately he began to weave a new theory concerning the burglary. He had woven many theories

before—avarice, spite, disappointed rivalry, had all supplied motives for them—but never had he considered the possibility of a love motive for the robbery. Supposing that some unfavoured suitor had seen the miniature, and, coveting it, had broken in to steal it. No! such a theory was too wild for even his own belief. Yet the likeness was so extraordinary that he looked forward to meeting the owner of the strangely attractive face again.

Fortune favoured him, for within a week he found himself at a garden party at which Meriel was also a guest. He sought and obtained an introduction from the hostess, and was quite oblivious to the chilly character of his reception.

"I particularly wanted to meet you, Miss Challis. Indeed, I may say that since I saw you at the opera a week ago your face has really haunted me," said Flurscheim.

Meriel's eyebrows arched. She meditated flight.

"I'm afraid you must have thought me an awful bounder staring at you the other night," he continued, "but your face was so familiar to me, and yet I could not recall where I had met you. It wasn't until after the opera was over that I remembered that one of my stolen miniatures was a most striking portrait of you; I hope you will realize that my rudeness was unintentional."

"I certainly did not think so at the time," replied Meriel.

"It was quite a relief when I placed my memory," said the connoisseur. "D'you know that I'm one of those men that are made supremely uncomfortable by a lapse of memory of that sort. I begin to think my brain's failing if it doesn't respond at once to any call I make upon it, and after my recent worry I really began to be anxious."

"Did the burglary worry you so much as all that?" replied Meriel. Usually sympathetic to any story of trouble, she felt it difficult to express any sympathy with the loss the wealthy connoisseur had sustained.

"Worry me?" asked Flurscheim in an astonished tone. "Worry me?" he repeated. "Worry isn't the name for what I've gone through. I can see you don't understand what a collector's treasures mean to him. My dear young lady"—in his excitement an accent became audible which made of the words "Ma tear young lady"—"my pictures are what I've lived for. If I lose them my life is as empty—as empty"—he looked round for an appropriate simile and found one handy—"as most of these people's pockets."

Meriel smiled at the racial revelation. Flurscheim thought she smiled at the simile itself. "Fortunately it was only one of my pictures that was taken," he continued, "but"—he could not resist the wail—"it was the best of the lot. I would much rather have lost any two of the others."

Meriel began to be interested in the man. He was

manifestly honest in his confession. She even managed to infuse a little sympathy into her inquiry as to whether the police had obtained no clue to the thief. By so asking she struck another chord in the keyboard of the Flurscheim emotions.

"The police! Fools! Dolts! Idiots!" he exclaimed. "Of what use are the police but to strut about and direct the traffic? When it comes to catching thieves they are just about as useful as the pigeons in the parks. Some of them call themselves detectives," he continued, with virulent scorn; "there's one of them, called Kenly, an inspector with a reputation of being one of the smartest men at Scotland Yard! Got it, I should think, the same way as an owl gets a reputation for wisdom. Cocks his ears, opens his eyes wide, and keeps his mouth shut. For nearly six weeks he has been doing nothing else but investigate my robbery. And what has he found out? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Detectives, bah!" He pulled himself up with an effort.

"I've promised myself I wouldn't talk about the matter to any one, Miss Challis. I can't do so without losing my temper, and it will give you a very bad opinion of me if I have to apologize to you twice in one day."

"You seem to lose it pretty easily, Mr. Flurscheim," she answered.

"Can't help it, Miss Challis, so I'll apologize straight away for doing so, and for staring at you the other

night, for I know you were annoyed. It never struck me that you might be annoyed, you know. Most girls to-day take it as a compliment when a man looks 'em over."

Meriel stiffened, and, looking away, met Guy's eyes. She had known that he expected to be present, and at the recognition her whole face brightened. Guy had already recognized Flurscheim, and though the fact that he was apparently engaged in earnest conversation with Meriel gave him a twinge of apprehension, he did not hesitate to come forward.

Flurscheim looked upon the young man disapprovingly as Meriel put her hand in his. He saw that his existence was momentarily obliterated from the girl's mind; but he did not move from her side. And when, still forgetful, she strolled away with Guy across the lawn, without even turning her head in his direction, he muttered a curse in which Guy was included amongst things in general, but from which Meriel herself was just as certainly excluded.

No sooner were they out of hearing than Guy gave expression to the curiosity which the sight of Flurscheim in conversation with Meriel had excited in him.

"However did that bounder Flurscheim manage to corner you, Miss Challis?" he asked.

Meriel glanced round. "Oh, I had quite forgotten him," she said, laughing, "although I was wondering how I should manage to escape from him when I saw you."

"After staring at you the other night in so impertinent a manner I wonder he had the cheek to face you," continued Guy irritably.

"Oh, he explained all that," replied Meriel. "He sought me out to-day in order to apologize." She told how the connoisseur had been puzzled to account for his familiarity with her face and his ultimate recognition of her as the autotype of one of his missing miniatures.

Guy smiled at the explanation. He realized with an exceptional degree of pleasure that the miniature was now in his own possession. He had long ago carefully removed the picture from the lid of the snuff-box in which it had been set, and had reset it himself in a simple gold frame with a circlet of brilliants. It was his by right of possession, and he determined that it should remain his. Incidentally the information Meriel had given him that she had been the object of Flurscheim's scrutiny came as a relief. It was proof that he himself was in no way suspected. At the same time it seemed to Guy an added impertinence on the part of the connoisseur that he should have sought to make Meriel's acquaintance. It gave him pleasure to think that he had despoiled the Jew of his treasures. He would have liked to have confided his thoughts to the girl at his side. He was almost on the point of doing so when his common sense bade him pause. She would not understand. She was not tutored in the doctrine of the rights of the indi-

vidual to possess everything upon which he may lay his hand. But he could not resist the opportunity which seemed to offer to open her eyes to some of his own beliefs. If he presented them delicately they might not offend. Crudely expressed, he knew that she would not listen to the doctrines.

"Flurscheim is hardly the sort of person who deserves to possess beautiful things," he hazarded.

"There seems something incongruous in the idea," she said, smiling her reply. "But there can be no doubt but that he has a very real love for them."

"Can't believe it," said Guy emphatically. "The capacity to acquire beautiful things and the capacity to see their beauties rarely go together."

"I should think that your argument would rather apply to the burglar who stole Mr. Flurscheim's valuables than to Mr. Flurscheim," replied Meriel merrily.

"Not necessarily," answered Guy. "It might be that the person in whose possession they are now is far more capable of appreciating the Greuze, or the miniature which he declares so like yourself, than he is; and if such should happen to be the case, hasn't the present possessor as much right as Flurscheim to the enjoyment of them?"

He spoke lightly, and Meriel replied in the same tone.

"Isn't that an argument which might apply to anything of the nature of personal possessions?" she asked.

"Certainly," he responded quickly. "Is the man or woman who wants a thing to go without it when somebody else has more of the same article than he knows what to do with? Look at that fat old woman over there"—the disrespectful allusion referred to the maternal relative of the latest American addition by marriage to the list of British peeresses—"she's so loaded up with jewels that she absolutely clanks as she walks. She has enough on her to satisfy the aspirations of a hundred ordinary women. Why should she have all those pretty stones and trinkets, and lots of other women go without?"

"She certainly is wearing far too much jewellery for a garden party," replied Meriel, her eyes twinkling.

"Yet if any other woman were to relieve her of even the smallest of her extraneous adornments, the mere possession of which would probably give her far more pleasure than it does to the present possessor, there's not a man or woman here who would not cry 'to gaol with the thief,'" said Guy.

Despite his intention, Guy had warmed to the argument, and he awoke a corresponding earnestness in his companion.

"I don't think I should," she said quietly. "I should pity her too much."

"But why?" he asked. "She would merely have shown herself to have the courage of her desires."

Meriel shook her head. "I always pity people who

cannot control their desires, particularly when those desires are for things that don't belong to them."

"But," urged Guy, "every one is born with the right to enjoy. That fat old woman has long ago ceased to find enjoyment in many of her trinkets. Why pity any one who would at one stroke relieve her of her burden and at the same time provide themselves with a new pleasure?"

Meriel knitted her brows. "I'm no good at an ethical argument, Mr. Hora," she said, "and I am quite sure you only want to get me to agree with you so that you may laugh at me afterwards."

"No," he answered, "I've no *arrière-pensée* of the sort you imagine. I know you would think it wrong—the majority think it wrong for any one to help themselves to other people's things—I want to know why."

Meriel looked at him archly. "Suppose I were to slip behind that comfortable old lady and snip off that little watch all studded with diamonds from her chatelaine, what would you think of me?"

"I wish to heaven you would," he answered.

Meriel laughed. "I should never have thought that you could be so strongly provoked by mere ostentation."

"I was not thinking of the old woman," he answered, "my admiration would be entirely attributable to your pluck in defying the conventions."

"But afterwards," she objected, "you could never have the slightest respect for me."

"On the contrary——" he began.

She interrupted him. "No," she said. "You would no more respect me than I could you if, for instance, you had stolen poor Mr. Flurscheim's picture."

He was taken aback by the apposite allusion. For a second, and for a second only, he imagined that there was intention in her selection of the simile; but a glance into the smiling eyes which met his so frankly disabused his mind of the idea. Clearly the girl never thought that he could possibly have engaged in such an adventure. She had not the slightest idea that he was guilty—no, that was the wrong word, the coward's word, no guilt attached to his actions—that he was capable of such a feat. She saw that he was disturbed and continued gaily—

"Why even the supposition of such a thing is repugnant to you, and yet you ask why."

"Even suppose that the idea is repugnant," he replied, "I still ask why it is so. Reason could justify the action."

"For reason say sophistry," she answered quickly. "You know that the repugnance of the thought is inbred. It's inherited. We can't help thinking like that because the knowledge of right and wrong is intuitive."

"A woman's answer," he answered lightly.

"A man's still more," she said, with earnestness. "One might possibly forgive a woman's theft—we are

the weaker creatures, and the more easily swayed by our desires—but the man should be strong enough to resist. No man worth the name could stoop to dishonour himself in so petty a manner, nor could he have aught but contempt for the woman who so gave way to her covetousness. No, Mr. Hora, you could never persuade me that you could have an atom of respect for me if I were to so forget my principles as to filch any one of the over-jewelled dowager's trinkets. Now, would you ? "

He sought refuge from the direct answer in a side issue. " But if your principles were such that you honestly believed that the good lady had no more right than yourself to her jewels, and that only the fear of punishment restrained you from taking possession of them ? "

Meriel laughed gaily. " I cannot even conceive such a possibility," she said. " It seems to me you are preaching anarchy, and I'm not the least little bit of an anarchist."

The approach of a third person interrupted Guy's reply. Looking away from Meriel, he saw Captain Marven standing beside him. The Captain had heard his niece's concluding words and he corroborated them.

" I can safely swear that a more tyrannical dictator of law and order than Meriel never stepped over a man's threshold. You must accuse her of something else, Hora."

Guy laughed, and the subject dropped; but the conversation had made an impression upon him. It had destroyed, though at the time he did not recognize the fact, the delight he had felt in being something apart from other men, the exhilaration of being in conflict with the world. The obvious scorn which the girl felt for the thief, her absolute belief that the idea of theft was as repugnant to him as it was to herself, were deadly blows to the philosophy which Lynton Hora fondly imagined he had planted so deeply as to be ineradicable. Guy felt that his belief was crumbling. He knew that if he were to be true to the man he knew as father he should forswear the bewitching companionship of the girl who exercised so unsettling an influence upon him. Nevertheless, when a little later Captain Marven asked him to visit them at their country home when the season was over, he accepted eagerly.

CHAPTER XI

GUY FINDS A NEW HOME

IN the days that followed the conversation between Guy and Meriel the young man's disquiet strengthened, though he hid his perturbation successfully enough from the eyes of his daily companions. He met the Marvens frequently, for he could not resist the fascination Meriel exercised upon him. He could see that he was a welcome visitor at the Marvens' house, and yet every time he accepted their hospitality he felt a twinge of regret that Captain Marven should have been a victim of his predatory philosophy, even though the victim had not been personally injured thereby. Instinctively he loathed himself for the treacherous part he appeared to be playing, even though he argued that he had but played a man's part in avenging his father's wrongs.

He would have felt more satisfied if he could have been made acquainted with the nature of those wrongs; but when he had ventured a question on the subject Lynton Hora's brow had wrinkled into a heavy frown, and he had harshly bidden Guy to refer no more to the subject. Nor could he gain the least enlighten-

ment from Meriel, though he had discreetly questioned her regarding her uncle's early life. No suspicion as to his real parentage ever crossed his mind. Meriel had merely referred to the great grief of her relatives' lives in terms which had produced in Guy's mind the idea that their only child had died in infancy. "Poor auntie and uncle lost their only child when he was three years old," she had said, "and even now no one ever dares mention his name in their presence, they feel the loss so acutely. His name was Guy, like yours, and I think that is partly why they seem to like you so much."

From his acquaintance with Captain Marven, Guy could not conceive that the kindly-hearted man had ever done any one a deliberate injury. He began to question the possibility of Hora being possessed of some delusion on the subject, and longed the more to be acquainted with the facts, in order that he might be in a position to put the misunderstanding right. Since that was hopeless, however, he was profoundly thankful that Hora had insisted upon his taking a residence apart.

He had found chambers which suited him in the Albany, and there he was free to brood over his own mental problems without the possibility of having to meet Lynton Hora's inquiring glance. He no longer felt satisfied with his tutor's philosophy. He was almost afraid to lay bare his new-born doubts to the scorn which the Commendatore would pour upon his

heart-searchings. He imagined that the Commendatore had no idea that any conflict was taking place in his mind.

He flattered himself that he had long since obtained complete mastery over the expression of his thoughts, that his face was no dial of his emotions, but a mask for their concealment. But he did less than justice to his mentor's perceptive powers. He was not conscious that it needed an effort to remain in the company of the Commendatore, but Lynton Hora perceived it, and realizing that Guy was concealing something from him, determined to become acquainted with the details of the matter concealed. He had not lost confidence in Guy. He did not imagine that the truth of principles he had so carefully instilled was likely to be questioned. But Captain Marven was so associated with the black days, marked indelibly in his life's calendar, that Hora could not feel easy in his mind now that Marven had once more crossed his path. Besides, for the consummation of the revenge he was planning, it was imperative that no nook or corner of Guy's life should be veiled from his sight. That was the real reason why he had suggested Guy's finding an abode for himself. He desired to be made acquainted with Guy's movements, the houses he visited, and the companions he affected when away from home. It would have been difficult to set such a watch on Guy if he had remained at the flat in Westminster without subjecting himself to inconvenience, but in-

stalled in chambers of his own it would be easy to obtain information.

Hora's first intention had been to keep watch himself on Guy's movements, but consideration decided him to employ some tool for the purpose. His thoughts had lingered for a moment on Myra, but that suggestion also was speedily put aside; she was too passionately interested in Guy to prove a trustworthy spy upon his actions. Hora knew where to look for a reliable tool, for, secretive though he was, averse to allowing any outsider to co-operate with him in the execution of any of his enterprises, yet he had kept in touch with certain of the companions who had worked beside him, groaned under the same harsh discipline in the days of his expiation. None of them knew him by name. But his face was known to them and welcomed, for he never appeared amongst them without bringing largess for their debauches, and, more welcome still, suggestions of places where booty awaited the skilful craftsman with bold heart, and wise words as to the means by which it might be acquired. These denizens of the lower world guessed that their unknown benefactor was of themselves, though moving on a higher plane. The suggestions he made were invariably audacious, but when put into practice they almost as invariably proved successful, so that the unknown became known amongst them as the Master.

Guy had not been settled in his new abode for more

than three days when Hora set out in search of some one who would undertake the business. He took all his usual precautions in order to avoid identification, though he relied more upon the assumption of a new character than upon any physical disguise. He entered a train which carried him away to London's most beautiful possession, the Royal Gardens of Kew. He entered the gates a bright, alert personality. He had an appreciative eye for the beauties of the trees and the flowers, but he did not linger amongst them, seeking a retired spot amongst the trees in the wild portion of the demesne. When half an hour later he retraced his steps, nothing but the curious limp in his gait would have hinted at his identity. The overcoat which he had carried on his arm was now worn on his back. Its threadbare seams and worn cuffs were an eloquent testimony of poverty. The sprucely folded umbrella had become baggy, and, instead of carrying it on his arm, he leaned heavily upon it. A pair of steel spectacles were fixed upon his nose. His hat had been exchanged for another much the worse for wear. His collar had been replaced by one of clerical cut. A Bible, much worn, was under his arm. He looked like a mild, inoffensive clergyman who had fallen upon evil days, or a curate who had never fallen upon good ones, and any one who spared him a single glance would have been ready to stake a good round sum that the contents of the bag he carried consisted mainly of tracts. Returning to the

railway station, he asked in the mildest of voices for a ticket to Latimer Road, and bungled over counting the change, while the people waiting behind him impatiently snorted at his clumsiness.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon for detaining you," he said, when the coppers were safely put away in a shabby old purse. He was always authentic in his impersonations.

No one took the slightest heed of him when he reached the station to which he had booked, and, alighting, set his face in the direction of Notting Dale. He walked steadily on, turning now to the left, now to the right again. Each street he entered seemed to worsen in some indefinable manner. The main road into which he had passed from the station had been merely one of London's characterless thoroughfares, with rows of struggling shops, each flaunting the banner of cheapness in the face of passers-by. A sign of a poor neighbourhood this, and off the main road the signs were more pronounced. The open doors, the women sitting at open windows, the babies on the stairs and the pavements, the voice of the coal hawker, were all unmistakable signs. Presently the dress of the women became more blowzy, the children dirtier, men were to be seen lolling from the windows and gathered in groups outside the doors of the public houses; when policemen were to be seen at all, they were in couples.

Hora's face wore an air of positive benevolence. A

boy of five or six years ran beside him with outstretched hand.

"Spare us a copper, guv'nor?" he asked.

Hora paused. "I have no coppers to spare, my child," he remarked.

"I ain't had no breakfus'," said the child.

Hora's eyes twinkled.

"I'm afraid you are not speaking the truth, my boy," he remarked blandly. "Still"—he opened his bag carefully and extracted therefrom a packet of sticky sweets and a bundle of tracts—"I don't expect you get many sweeties. Hold out your hand."

The youngster did as he was bidden. Hora counted four sugary lumps into the eager palm. "Never tell a lie, my boy," he said solemnly.

The child seemed unimpressed. "I say, is that all, guv'nor?" he asked, as Hora replaced the paper of sweets in his bag.

The incident had not passed unobserved. From a doorway close at hand a bullet-headed man, whose cranial outline was the more strongly marked because of the closely cropped hair, was looking on with a grin on his countenance, while across the road a couple of policemen were also watching. The bullet-headed person spoke suddenly.

"You run away and stop worriting the good gen'lman," he said.

The boy looked up, caught sight of the policemen,

and, whirling about on his heels, disappeared like a rabbit into its burrow.

"The very kids in this street learn to tell the tale afore they can walk," remarked the round-head pleasantly.

"I'm afraid it's a very wicked street," said Hora, with a sigh. "The devil has many disciples in Fancy Lane."

"Guess you're right there, guv'nor," replied the man. "There's two on 'em comin' across the road to talk to you now." There was the shadow of a wink in his eye.

"Let me hope you will have nothing to do with them," said Hora earnestly, "any more than I should myself. You must know where companionship of that sort leads."

"I know that right enough," said the man, passing his hand over his closely cropped head. "I don't have no more truck with that sort than I can help."

Hora reopened his bag and took from it a tract. "You may find some helpful words here," he said. "This little story is called 'The Downward Path.' Take it, and may it prove a blessing to you."

He turned away, and, for the first time, appeared to become aware of the presence of the two policemen.

"I am afraid that I did not rightly apprehend that good man's meaning," he said aloud, as if talking to himself.

One of the policemen looked down upon the bent figure.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "I just wanted to make sure it was you, because this street, as you know, isn't too safe for strangers."

"Thank you, my friend," replied Hora; "but you know that I am as safe here as at my own home."

The policemen passed on.

"There won't come no harm to him," said the elder to his companion. "They knows he's a harmless old crank, an' they chy-ikes him a bit for comin' to convert 'em with a packet of tracts for the men and a packet of sweets for the kids; but he's safe enough, for he never has anything about him to make it worth while any one knocking him on the head."

"He comes pretty reg'lar, I suppose then?" asked the second constable. "I've not seen him before."

"Three or four times a year, maybe. There's plenty knows him in the street."

They passed out of sight and Hora went on his way, stopping now and then to speak to a man or a woman, or to bestow a sweet on some urchin in the gutter. So, progressing slowly, he reached an archway which had once formed an entrance to a builder's yard. He passed beneath it and crossed the open space to a shed which stood at the far end. The ground was littered with rubbish of all sorts—dirty wisps of straw, dirty pieces of newspaper, rotting cabbage stalks, and decomposing remains of fish. Reaching the shed, he

gave no knock, but pushed the door open and entered. Outside the July sun was shining brightly, and within the darkness was so dense that he stood still until his eyes grew accustomed to it. The shed was provided with one small window, but three of its four panes were glazed with brown paper, and the remaining pane of glass was so begrimed that only a feeble light forced entrance through it.

While he stood in the doorway striving to penetrate the gloom, a human voice, though it was so far unlike the ordinary human voice that it might have belonged to any creature but one made in God's image, began to mutter and gurgle in the darkest corner.

"Ma Norton?" asked Hora.

The answer came like the wheeze of a dropsical spider.

"Get out of this. I don't want no antem cacklers round my place."

By this time Hora's vision had grown accustomed to the semi-darkness. He took off his hat and laid it on the table. He saw that but for one old woman seated in a corner there was no one else present. "Your eyesight's failing, Ma," he remarked composedly.

The old woman struggled to her feet. "Blimy if it ain't the Master hisself!" she wheezed. "What's brought you down here again so soon?"

"What else should but the desire to see you a reformed character, the desire to read the Bible to you,

pray with you, with the object of ending your days in the workhouse like a decent Christian woman. Ha ! ha ! ha ! " He laughed at his own ribaldry.

" He ! he ! he ! " the old woman cackled in response. Her pallid, pendulous, flabby cheeks flapped as she shook with merriment. Her enormous frame, held loosely together about the waist and shoulders with untidy tapes, threatened to collapse like a half-cooled jelly shaken too soon from the mould. The tears started from her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She gasped and choked until, reaching for a bottle standing handily on a shelf, she poured something from it into a tumbler standing by and tossed off the draught.

" That's better," she remarked. " You shouldn't make me laugh, Master. Laughing shakes me so that I'm afraid it'll be the death of me some day."

" No fear," answered Hora. " You will finish yourself off with the gin-bottle first."

" Lord ! what a man it is for making game of an old woman's little weakness," she replied composedly. " But what's brought you here to-day out of your time ? Nothin's happened to my gal, has there ? "

" Getting anxious to have her home again ? " remarked Hora sardonically. " I'm not sure that she would appreciate the home you could give her."

He looked round him and smiled at the thought of Myra transported into such surroundings. The bare walls of the shed with the plaster broken and crumbling away ; the filthy floor with a grimy sack thrown

before the fenderless fireplace to do service as rug; the two stained deal tables littered with odd articles of crockery, remnants of food, articles of attire, all mixed up together; the broken chairs; the grubby bed and bedding in the corner, would make a strange setting for the exotic beauty who at that very moment would probably be stepping from her perfumed bath to don a dainty dressing-gown before submitting to the ministrations of her maid.

The old woman watched his glance distrustfully. "You ain't thinking of turning her out, Master?" she whined. "I know very well she's well off where she is, an' you know this ain't no place for the likes of her."

"I might bring her here to see you one day. I'm sure she would be glad to see her mother," he remarked.

The woman rose again from the chair. She spoke with ill-concealed agitation.

"Don't you go for to do it, Master. Don't you do it. I'm quite satisfied so long as I knows she's all right. There ain't no call for her to set eyes on the likes of me. Why, it might happen that she would be sick at the sight." Her voice died away, and she repeated dully, "Don't you go for to do it."

"I don't think she would be exactly pleased," remarked Hora. "But make your mind easy, Ma; it's nothing to do with Myra that I want to see you about. You hear a lot of things in this part of the world, and

I wondered whether by any chance you have heard lately of Corny Jessel. I have a job for him."

The old woman reseated herself and helped herself thoughtfully to another allowance of gin. "When did I last hear tell of him," she murmured. "Not so long ago, for certain. The shadder-man, you mean, ain't it, Master? Corny Jessel, the shadder-man?"

"Yes," said Hora, "the shadow-man."

"My memory ain't what it was," said the old woman disconsolately, "but I'm sure I heard about him only the other day."

Hora lit a cigarette and smoked calmly while the woman racked her memory. At last he was rewarded for his patience.

"It was Bully Hagan telled me he'd seen him only the other day."

"The round-headed man who's just come out of prison?" asked Hora.

"Lives at twenty-seven in the street, first-floor front," said the woman.

"I met him on my way here," said Hora. "I'll go and find him." He rose to go.

"You haven't told me how my gal's lookin'," said the woman.

Hora laughed, but he good-naturedly complied with the request, and for five minutes poured into the greedy ears of the woman a description of the dresses and the jewels her daughter wore at the theatres and dinners and dances to which she had recently been.

Then he took his departure, leaving behind him a couple of gold pieces in the old woman's palm. In the street he resumed his missionary demeanour, and, passing along from house to house, found Bully Hagan at the same spot where he had parted from him, and in exchange for another piece of gold was soon put in possession of the address he sought. He wrote it down on a piece of paper—

Cornelius Jessel, Woodbine Cottage,
Melpomene Road, Wimbledon—

and resuming his progress, came at last to the more respectable streets and finally to the railway station again.

CHAPTER XII

INSPECTOR KENLY'S LODGER

ONE day at the beginning of July Detective-Inspector Kenly's face as he left the railway station and stepped out briskly homewards wore a particularly injured air. It was not entirely owing to the sultry state of the atmosphere, though that may have had something to do with his frame of mind. He considered himself to be a greatly aggrieved man. In the first place his investigations into the Flurscheim burglary had been an abject and total failure. He had spent day and night following up illusory clues without the slightest result. On top of this he had been entrusted with the investigation of the stolen despatch affair, and after three days' laborious inquiry found himself no nearer any accurate result than he had been when he commenced, save that certain names on the list of members of the Stock Exchange had been ticked off as unable to afford any information. These failures he might have borne with equanimity had they been his sole grievance. But he had another, and, being a purely personal, private, domestic grievance, it rankled far more than any of the others.

Detective-Inspector Kenly was a married man, and when Mrs. Detective-Inspector determined to have her own way, Mr. Detective-Inspector, however clever he was at circumventing the wiliest of criminals, invariably succumbed to the wiles of the smiling lady who ruled over his household. Happily any difference between them was rare, but there was one subject upon which they never could agree. The inspector liked to keep his home to himself. He thought that his good lady had quite enough to do to look after himself and the two little Kenlys. But that was not Mrs. Kenly's opinion at all. She thought that no home was complete without a lodger. To her such a thing as a spare bedroom in her house was an abomination. She looked upon it as so much capital lying idle, instead of being put out at interest with some eligible young man or young woman. When he had taken Woodbine Cottage, Melpomene Road, Wimbledon, Kenly had thought that he should have circumvented Mrs. Kenly's little idiosyncrasy. But there were two attics in the cottage which had not entered into his calculations. It did not occur to him that they could be utilized for any other purpose than as box-rooms; but Mrs. Kenly thought differently. In her eyes they would make quite adequate, if small, bedrooms, so before he had been settled in the house for a month all the inspector's arrangements were recast: the youthful Kenlys were relegated to the attics, while the largest bedroom on the first-floor

was furnished as a bed-sitting-room, and a card placed in the window announced to all and sundry that "furnished apartments" were to be secured at Woodbine Cottage.

The card did not remain there very long. Woodbine Cottage looked so spick and span—the bright windows, the white curtains, the spotless doorstep and shining brass knocker were such attractive testimonials to the quality of the accommodation to be found within—that the eligible lodger was speedily secured. For six years Inspector Kenly entertained a single lady of mature years and a small income. He did not repine overmuch, for she had few friends, gave little trouble, and was more or less of a companion to Mrs. Kenly when his business, as it often did, took him away from home.

But when she left, Inspector Kenly made another effort to persuade his wife to do without "the lodger." In vain he argued that his income was ample for the wants of the household. Mrs. Kenly would not listen.

Once again the card appeared in the window, and in due course Cornelius Jessel, passing by, saw it there, and being at the time in want of a quiet retreat in a really respectable neighbourhood, thought that the apartments, if not too expensive, would suit him. He saw the bed-sitting-room. He liked its appearance so well that he paid a week's rent there and then in advance, and thus when Inspector Kenly returned

home one evening he found that he was once more possessed of a lodger.

Possibly if Cornelius Jessel had been acquainted with the position and occupation of the head of the household into which he had entered, he might not have been so ready to take possession of the comfortable bed-sitting-room. But Inspector Kenly did not think it desirable to blazon abroad his connection with Scotland Yard. He had particularly insisted upon any lodger who entered his house remaining unacquainted with his profession. So Cornelius Jessel had not the slightest idea that he was living under the roof of one of the men whom he had long ago learned to look upon as enemies. Indeed, he had real reasons to fear the emissaries of law and order. Not that he was by any means a person of importance in the criminal world. He was merely one of those backboneless creatures who have the will but lack the courage to do any daring deed which would make them famous in the annals of crime; one of those poor shrinking, cringing creatures who are content to play the part of jackal to more venturesome spirits, a petty thief sometimes, an astute writer of begging letters at others, a deviser of petty frauds for robbing poor people of a few stamps on every convenient occasion.

When he had timidly asked to be shown the vacant apartments in Woodbine Cottage, Mrs. Kenly had decided at once that he would prove amenable to any rules and regulations she might like to impose upon

him. He agreed with such a deprecating air to every suggestion she made as to the points which seemed desirable in a well-conducted lodger that her heart quite warmed to him. He thought sixpence a scuttle for coals "most reasonable." He agreed that the room was certainly worth more than the seven-and-sixpence weekly paid in advance which Mrs. Kenly demanded for rent and attendance. He exhibited the liveliest satisfaction when Mrs. Kenly informed him that beyond a shilling a week for "gas" she charged "no extras," and came to a most satisfactory arrangement regarding the meals he proposed to take at home and the price he was to pay for them. Mrs. Kenly thought in her own mind that a bachelor was much more profitable than a maiden of mature years and congratulated herself on her luck. When she further learned from Cornelius Jessel that he was engaged in "literary pursuits" and would not be disturbed by many callers, though his work might sometimes keep him in the house all day, she thought she was indeed in luck's way, and was fully prepared to defend her action when called upon.

She found it necessary to do so from the first. Inspector Kenly objected most strenuously to the presence of a male lodger in the house. He objected still more when he had made the acquaintance of his new tenant. He disliked Jessel's appearance. The pale hair, pale complexion, pale watery eyes roused his antipathy. He disliked Jessel's manner still more.

The lodger did not walk as an ordinary man, he glided from place to place. He glided down the stairs and out of the front door, and he glided in again and up the stairs, so that no one ever knew whether he was in or out of the house. His apologetic manner, his dislike of going abroad by day, his abstemiousness, his apparent lack of acquaintances, the very decorum of his habits, were to Inspector Kenly reasons for suspicion.

The inspector was no mean judge of men, and he dubbed Jessel a thief at sight. "Some day we shall find him and the spoons missing," he said to his wife.

She laughed at the idea. "Well, if that should happen, I shall depend upon you to recover them for me," she replied.

She did not believe that there was any harm in the man. But the inspector was so certain in his own mind that he spent some hours searching the records at Scotland Yard after having secured some of his tenant's finger-prints by a trick. The search was quite useless. There was no record against him. Hitherto he had always managed to evade the law.

It was the fact that he had been unable to secure the proof he desired that constituted Inspector Kenly's third and greatest grievance. Everything seemed to be going wrong with him. He had been so certain that he would be able to provide good and sufficient reasons to his wife for getting rid of the detested lodger that, when he found that he was unable to do so, he

began to doubt whether his instincts were not playing him false.

Thus brooding he turned into Melpomene Road. Several yards before him was an elderly man wearing a clerical collar with an overcoat threadbare at the seams, a little black bag in his hand, and a Bible under his arm, and slightly dragging one foot after him as he walked.

"Nonconformist parson," commented the inspector to himself. The stranger was looking each side of him as he passed up the street, but on reaching Woodbine Cottage he paused, lifted the latch of the gate and, entering, made his way to the front door.

"A visitor for the lodger," commented the inspector, and he passed by his own door to the end of the road. When he returned the Nonconformist parson had disappeared. The inspector let himself quietly into the house with his latchkey. An opportunity was afforded him of learning something concerning the lodger which he determined not to neglect. He said nothing to Mrs. Kenly as to his intention, for his suspicion that the tenant of the first-floor front was, to use his own expressive phrase, "on the crook," might not prove capable of demonstration. He merely said that he had business that evening, and could only remain in the house a few minutes. So Mrs. Kenly popped the tea in the teapot forthwith, dished up the haddock which had been simmering over the pan on the kitchen fire, and directed all her attention to

supplying her husband's requirements. While thus engaged the lodger's bell rang, but she paid no heed to the summons until she had seen that the inspector's needs were all provided for.

"I expect Mr. Jessel wants a cup of tea for his visitor," she remarked when the bell tinkled a second time.

"So he has begun to have callers at last, has he?" remarked the inspector.

"It's the first time since he come to live with us, a month ago last Thursday," replied Mrs. Kenly, "and a nice-spoken old clergyman, too. I always thought as he was a most respectable young man, and now I'm sure of it." She bustled off to answer the bell in the absence of the youthful maid-of-all-work, who had been sent out with the two young Kenlys to picnic on the Common.

Inspector Kenly said nothing. When Mrs. Kenly returned and prepared a tray with two cups on it he chatted about indifferent things. He finished his tea leisurely. "I'll just have a rinse before I go out again," he remarked to his wife. He closed the door of the little sitting-room behind him and mounted the stairs. When occasion required, Inspector Kenly, in spite of his six feet of muscular manhood, could be as light-footed as any cat, and not a stair creaked as he mounted them to his own bedroom, the door of which was opposite that of the room in which the lodger was entertaining his guest. In his own doorway he paused and listened.

He could hear a murmur of voices, that was all. Stay! his trained ear caught the sound of a name twice repeated, "Guy Hora." It meant nothing to him, but he noted it instinctively. The voices dropped to a murmur again and the inspector returned downstairs, and, after lighting his pipe and telling his wife that he did not expect to be very late home, he slipped out of the back door and made his way leisurely to the end of the street.

His meal had put him in a much more contented frame of mind, and as he puffed away at his pipe he smiled at the thought that he should be engaged in keeping observation on his own house. It reminded him of his early days in the detective force, and he remembered how often he had waited hours without anything rewarding his patience. This time his patience was not severely tried. He had not finished his first pipeful of tobacco when his lodger's visitor made his appearance, and, passing along the street, took a turning which led to the nearest railway station.

Inspector Kenly walked briskly in the same direction, but by another route. It was slightly longer than the one Lynton Hora had taken, but Kenly was there first. He was on the platform before Hora and was in the guard's break almost as soon as the train came into the platform. He observed that his lodger's visitor carefully scanned the carriages as they passed him and entered an empty first-class compartment.

"Hard-up parsons don't usually travel first-class," commented Inspector Kenly to himself.

He kept his eyes fixed on the door of that compartment all the way to the terminus, but it remained unopened until Waterloo was reached. There, watching more keenly than ever, he chuckled at his own acumen when his observation was rewarded by the sight of a very differently attired person to the shabbily clad old clergyman who had entered the compartment stepping from the train. The clerical hat and collar and the spectacles had disappeared. The shabby overcoat carried on Hora's arm revealed only a new silk lining, which was not out of keeping with the smartly cut lounge suit Hora was wearing beneath. His stoop abandoned, he seemed three or four inches taller, but he still carried his bag, and Kenly could not have mistaken the limp.

The detective walked briskly along the platform to the exit of the station, giving one glance at Hora's face as he passed him. Hora was signalling a cab and paid no attention. At the exit the detective paused. The cab which contained the man he was following drove through the gate, and he heard the address which the cabman shouted to the clerk in the cab registry office. He gained the street, and hailing an empty cab passing at the moment, gave the driver an address two doors distant from that which had reached his ears. A block in the traffic at a street corner enabled him to catch up the cab he pursued. Nor did he

again lose sight of it until Hora, alighting, paid the man and entered his own residence.

The detective looked at his watch. Seven o'clock. There was plenty of time before him. He also dismissed his cabman and strolled along to the building which Hora had entered. Unless his memory was at fault, he guessed that he would have very little difficulty in obtaining all the information he desired. He knew the block of mansions, and he knew that a year or two previously an old comrade of his was employed there in the capacity of hall porter. His memory had not deceived him. As he reached the door his old comrade opened it to allow a lady to pass. Recognition was mutual. Inspector Kenly entered. When he left he was acquainted with all that the servants in Westminster Mansions knew of Lynton Hora's household, but the information he had gleaned afforded him no sort of a hint as to the nature of the connection which existed between him and Cornelius Jessel, the detective's literary lodger.

CHAPTER XIII

POISONED WORDS

A HUNDRED times a day Myra told herself that she would forget Guy, that she would tear every tender memory of him from her heart, and a hundred times a day her heart cried out passionately that forgetfulness were impossible, since every time she saw him her hunger for his love grew fiercer. There came a day when she realized that it was impossible to persuade herself that she might ever forget, and when she thus surrendered herself to the bitter-sweet reflection of the folly of bestowing a love which was unreturned, she realized also that certainly and surely Guy was drifting further away from her.

If he had remained under the same roof she would have been content for the relationship of brother and sister to endure, but when she could no longer watch over his outgoings and incomings she became possessed of a devouring desire to know how and where he spent his time. With a woman's intuition she guessed that he could not remain fancy free. He was not that type of man. She knew that by him the feminine complement would inevitably be sought and found. She

had thought that he might have found that complement in her. When Hora had told her that she had been too near Guy she had trusted his knowledge of the world; but after Guy had been living away from them for a month and he had shown no alteration in his demeanour, she told herself that Hora had merely lied to her to prevent her protesting against a plan which was to place Guy out of her reach. She thought she saw that plan maturing as the weeks passed and Guy's visits became fewer and fewer. Hora did not apparently mind when he only came in for a brief half-hour in the morning during a whole week, and made that visit merely to announce that he was going out of town on the following day and was uncertain when he would return.

Myra remembered that six months previously he would have acted very differently. Then any plan formulating in his mind would have been discussed between all of them, then she would have known where he was going and when he might be expected to return.

She did Lynton Hora an injustice. He was in reality as much perturbed as herself at the alteration in Guy's demeanour; but he could await the explanation with more equanimity since he had taken steps to discover the reason. He did not for a moment suppose that Guy's opinions were undergoing any change. Even as Myra, he suspected a feminine reason for Guy's reserve on the subject of his movements.

He did not attempt to force a confidence from the young man, he was far too astute. He had no belief in confidences that were not volunteered.

Guy was glad that he had not been asked for an explanation as to his movements. He felt ashamed that he could have accepted an invitation to the house of his supposed father's enemy. Yet he could not have resisted the opportunity which would be afforded him of spending whole days in the sweet companionship of Meriel Challis. So, after his acceptation of the invitation given him, he had stayed away from Westminster Mansions. He had not thought of Myra at all. They had been boy and girl together—confidants, playmates, brother and sister. The idea of any other relationship had never for a moment crossed his mind, and when he bade her a careless good-bye and mechanically kissed her cheek he had not the slightest suspicion that her heart was in a tumult, that at the faintest encouragement she would have thrown herself into his arms and offered her lips.

She gave no indication of the emotion which swayed her then, but all day she brooded over the coldness of the farewell alone in her room—not with tears, the time for that relief was not yet come.

Hora had observed, but said nothing. But when she did not make her appearance at the dinner-table he went to her room. The door was locked. He began to be afraid. But she answered to his knocking that

Myra rose from her chair, pale now with anger. "And now you insult me," she cried.

He would have interrupted her, but she overpowered his words with a torrent of her own. "Oh, you have the right to insult me as you please, I don't question it. Did you not buy me, as you have told me often enough, body and soul for a piece of gold and a bottle of gin? The master cannot insult the slave, you will say. I suppose I ought to smile at your reproaches, but when you accuse me of having driven Guy away—it is too much, Commendatore. I cannot bear that accusation at least."

She dropped limply into the chair from which she had risen, her face fell forward into her hands, and her whole body was shaken with a storm of sobs.

Hora was silent. He had provoked the storm. He waited for its subsidence before he broached the subject he had in his mind. Presently tears came to Myra's relief, the crystal drops broke through her fingers. She lay back in the chair exhausted by the cyclone of passion.

"I have something yet to say, Myra," remarked Hora quietly. "I believe you when you say that you have done nothing to drive Guy away, but that belief makes it necessary to look for another explanation. Guy is of the age when there is only one possible explanation. He is blind to your beauty, Myra; have you any idea as to any other woman who is likely to have attracted him?"

There was a subtle meaning in Hora's voice which arrested Myra's wandering attention. She looked up. Tears had reddened her eyes, a hardness came into her face. She was almost ugly. She crushed her handkerchief into a ball.

"What do you mean, Commendatore?" she asked. Then, as she met Hora's eyes, she bent forward to him. "You know something, you know something." She forced the words from between clenched teeth.

Hora made no answer, and she continued, "You need not trouble about breaking it to me gently, Commendatore. Who is it?"

The Commendatore was unmoved by her emotion.

"I am asking you, Myra. As yet I have only a suspicion. I was wondering whether you could not give me confirmation."

"Don't play with me any longer, Commendatore," she pleaded, "I am not a child."

He seemed to be moved by the appeal, for he answered with animation, "Indeed, Myra, you do me an injustice. I know nothing certainly, I only suspect; and I am blaming you, Myra, you, for allowing Guy to be taken from us."

She gazed at him stupidly while she repeated his words—"You are blaming me?"

"Yes," he answered, "I am blaming you. You are young, you are beautiful. Day by day you have been in Guy's company, and yet you have allowed

she had a headache and could not eat. He reasoned with her and commanded that she should join him at the table. She was on the point of refusing, but habit was strong. She obeyed his peremptory request, though sullenly. Hora took no notice of her mood while the meal was being served, but when it was over and Myra rose from the table he rose too and followed her. She went direct towards her own room. He checked her.

"I must speak to you to-night, Myra," he said. "I have something important to say to you."

She passed through the door which Hora held open for her without a word and threw herself into a chair. She anticipated some reproach, but she was far too miserable to care for reproaches.

Hora was silent awhile after he had entered and seated himself opposite her. Then he spoke sharply: "What have you been saying or doing to Guy to drive him away from his home?"

The suddenness, the preposterous nature of the charge aroused Myra as nothing else could have done. Her lethargy vanished. The colour flashed to her cheeks and the light to her eyes, though surprise tied her tongue, so that Hora had to repeat the query.

"What have I done to Guy?" she answered. "What do you mean? Do you think that I—that I —would do anything to send him away?"

"I can conceive of no other reason why he should

have so deserted his home of late," answered Hora coldly. He was deliberately provoking a storm, and it burst upon him.

"I am not quite the fool you suppose me to be, Commendatore," she cried hotly. "You cannot impose upon me with the shallow pretence that you think I am responsible for Guy's absence. I am not blind. I can see plainly enough that your intention has been to get Guy away, and there can only be one motive for your wishing to do so. You think that he can do far better for himself than to mate with the girl you picked up from the gutter."

"Suppose I have thought so; what then?" asked Hora. "What cause have you for complaint?"

"None," she answered, her voice full of bitterness. "Save that you have allowed me to live in a fool's paradise, that you have encouraged me to believe that one day the impossible might happen, that you have encouraged me to believe that there was no one you would so welcome as daughter as myself. I don't know why you should have instilled such a belief in my mind, Commendatore, unless you have hated me all the time. You must have done so, and now you should be glad. You have made me suffer—well, now you can gloat over the thought."

"Made you suffer, have I?" answered Hora scornfully. "You don't know what suffering is. The vapourings of a love-sick girl—bah! I have no patience with such sentimental bleatings."

that a man's will dies when a woman's arms are around him and her lips are pressed against his. Teach him the lesson, Myra, for I tell you that if such a passion as yours does not awaken a response in his heart he is much less than man. You want to know how to make victory certain. Take lesson of Delilah, but do not let too many opportunities pass. Remember that once you win him he is won for ever. I am on your side."

Myra listened, fascinated by Hora's subtle suggestions. He ceased speaking and stole softly out of the room. She did not hear him depart. Her mind was in a tumult. There was joy in the thought that the Commendatore had at last not merely given her permission to win Guy, but had urged her to the conquest. There was dread lest another, the unknown rival, should already have won him. There was doubt in her mind that she might fail, but that was tempered with a knowledge of her own beauty. She hastened to her own room and asked the mirror for information. Yes, beauty of face and form were both hers. Gladly would she have laid her beauties at Guy's feet, but to use them to entrap him—a flood of crimson overwhelmed her at the thought. And yet, rather than another should take him from her there was no shame to which she would not cheerfully submit. Even if Guy should scorn her she would still have tasted the fierce joy of possession.

Cunningly had Lynton Hora made use of his know-

ledge of the girl's complex nature. He had heaped fuel upon the flames of her desire; he had artfully suggested that it was within her power to light an answering flame in Guy's heart. He had taunted her with cowardice in submitting without effort to a rival's success; he had even recalled her humble origin to her mind, as if he would make it clear that she could not stoop to conquer. And the poison which he had dropped in her ear entered into her veins until it filled her whole being. But Guy did not return.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHADOW-MAN

THE whole of Cornelius Jessel's cringing heart and slinking soul was put into the work which the Master had given him to do. He loved to peer and pry into other people's business, even when no hope of any immediate advantage to himself promised to reward his curiosity. But when such work produced solid golden results no one in the world could have devoted himself with more keenness to it than "Ma" Norton's "shadder-man." And the Master was no niggard. When he paid his visit to Inspector Kenly's house in Melpomene Road he had left behind him twenty pieces of gold. "If I am satisfied with you I shall continue to pay you the same amount at the end of every four weeks," he had said; "but remember that I shall do so only on condition that you act strictly on my instructions."

Cornelius had protested a determination to devote himself absolutely to fulfilling his employer's commands, while his eyes glistened at the sight of the gold.

The Master did not trust entirely to the spy's

avarice. "You had better obey," he sneered, "for if you do not you will probably find that one or two little incidents in your career, with which you have not hitherto been identified, will become known in quarters where you are not likely to be viewed with any special favour."

Cornelius Jessel had shivered at the tone his patron adopted, and had renewed his protestations.

"I warn you first," the Master had continued coldly, "so that you may be free to refuse or accept as you please. Once you accept, however, remember that you will have to reckon with me, and I never forget to repay the man who plays me false."

Jessel had accepted when he had learned that he was required to do nothing which could by any chance bring him into conflict with the law, that he was merely required to watch over and report upon the doings of a certain Guy Hora. One reservation the Master had been compelled to make, even though he realized that it might have the very opposite effect he desired. He warned Cornelius to make no inquiries concerning the young man's own family. "I know all about his father and sister," he remarked, giving his own address, "and besides wasting your time, any interference in that direction might upset my plans. What I want you to do is to find out who are his friends and all about them, what houses he visits and for what purpose. You know the way to set about it, by getting hold of the servants and so on."

Yes, Cornelius knew, and it tickled his vanity to think that the Master had realized his talents in that direction.

Then another thought had seemed to strike Hora. "The young man," he said, "has a manservant to look after him who was dismissed from his last berth for drunkenness. He pretends to be retrieving his character. Well, if by any chance he were to lose it again I think I could manage to get you his berth. I need hardly point out that in such a position you might be in a position to earn the salary I propose to pay you with great ease to yourself."

Cornelius understood. He suspected from the Master's words that Guy was a well-feathered pigeon, upon whom the eyes of a hawk were fixed. When the time came for plucking he realized that one or two stray feathers might easily be blown in the servant's way. He said nothing of his thoughts in this direction, but when the Master had left him he was as keen to find out all he could concerning Guy as his patron could have wished. He would have started that same night, only he had been forbidden to do so.

Accordingly it was not until the next day that Guy became possessed of two shadows. He was not aware of the fact. He did not know that outside the door of his chambers in the Albany a shadow lurked to mingle with his own and to follow him wherever he went. He did not know that it accompanied him to

his tailor's and peered through the window while he was fitted with the latest thing in waistcoats. He did not know that it rode behind his cab to the club and waited there until he emerged, and then, picking its companion up, went hand in hand with it to the theatre, where it was lost in the shadows of the pit while he sat in the stalls. He could not know, therefore, that this second shadow was utterly unlike his own, in that it possessed an avid curiosity to learn what he was doing within the doors which alone proved a barrier to it. He did not know that when it had followed him three days in one week to Captain Marven's town house that the door no longer proved impassable to it. He could not have known that when he was in the drawing-room Cornelius Jessel was in the kitchen eagerly listening to details of the gossip of the servants' hall, which had already decided that "that nice young gentleman, Mr. Guy Hora," seemed to have "attracted Miss Meriel's fancy for sure," and that both the "master and the mistress were just doing their level best to bring the match off."

Day by day Lynton Hora had received the report of his spy, and thus he had learned what he had to fear. He had early taken an opportunity for enlisting Myra's aid to recall the wanderer when the opportunity should offer. But though he had learned something, he was by no means satisfied with the information.

He wanted a more intimate knowledge of the progress of events, and meeting the shadow-man by

appointment, he harped again upon the desirability of the shadow being within the very same roof as the person to which it was attached.

The shadow from that moment transferred itself from master to man. It followed him on his errands, it gained his acquaintance; it proved itself a merry, affable shadow indeed, with a pleasant fund of genial anecdote, and a carelessness about the tightness of its purse-strings, so that James Under, whose one thought for the fortnight he had already been in Guy's service had been to escape the pursuing, remorseless alcohol fiend, welcomed the acquaintance as an ally. In his off hours, and they were many, the temptation to Under to turn into the nearest saloon bar had been almost irresistible, until he met with Jessel. After the meeting Cornelius proved an innocuous alternative. He did not appear anxious to cement the acquaintance with a drink. Under was glad when he met his new friend. They spent a whole Sunday afternoon in the park together, and nothing stronger than tea passed their lips. They went to a music-hall in company, and ginger-beer was the innocuous refreshment which Jessel proposed. He was far too astute to hasten his plans until the fitting time. That arrived soon enough for his purpose.

One evening, when Jessel had arranged to meet his friend for a visit to the theatre, Under met him with the information that Guy required him to return to his chambers about ten. The evening was wet.

"It's no use thinking of the theatre," remarked Jessel to his companion, sheltering him with his umbrella as they walked down Piccadilly towards the Circus. "We shall have to postpone our visit until another evening. But"—he stopped suddenly—"I tell you what, Under, why shouldn't we be swells for once in our lives? I'm in funds to-night, and I just fancy myself dining at one of the tiptop restaurants."

"I don't think——" began Under, and paused. "My togs," he added expressively.

"The guv'nor's got more than one suit, hasn't he?" asked Cornelius. "You will have plenty of time to change on your return."

The valet was tickled with the idea. "It would be a bit of all right," he murmured gleefully. "I've often thought I'd like to be one of themselves, just to know what it felt like to be waited on instead of having to wait."

"Come along then," said Cornelius impulsively. He wheeled his companion round and hurried him back to Guy's chambers.

But outside the door Under paused. "What about you?" he asked.

Cornelius laughed.

"I intended to 'ave dinner by myself somewhere if you couldn't come to the theatre," he remarked, "an' I prepared accordin'."

Under had bestowed small attention on his com-

panion's attire, but now he looked more closely at him. Jessel unbuttoned his overcoat and the valet observed that he wore correct evening dress. His last scruples vanished.

"Come inside and wait, I shall be ready in a jiffy," he said.

Cornelius entered Guy's abode and condescended to smoke one of Guy's cigarettes while his companion rigged himself out in one of his master's evening suits. Under was not long in making the change. He strutted into the room with a most consequential air when he made his reappearance. One of Guy's silk hats was on his head, one of Guy's white waistcoats had been made to meet round his waist, displaying one of Guy's newest shirts. He carried one of Guy's light overcoats over his arm, and, selecting one of Guy's cigarettes, he lit it and professed himself to be "fit for anything."

The two sallied forth again. Reaching the street, Cornelius hailed a passing hansom-cab, giving the driver the address of a fashionable restaurant close at hand.

"Why not walk?" exclaimed Under.

"Real toffs never walk," replied Jessel, and Under was dumb.

The next quarter of an hour passed as time passes in dreamland. The bowing commissionaire at the door, the unobtrusive waiters, the gaily-lighted room, with nearly every table occupied with parties of diners,

the flowers, the beautiful women, seemed unsubstantial. He had seen them all before, it is true, it was no unaccustomed sight, but the circumstances were so different. Now all this was prepared for him—for his own especial delectation.

He awoke suddenly. An ice-pail was wheeled beside the table, and the wine waiter, lifting a gold-foiled bottle from the glittering crystals, drew the cork. He could not refuse, though for one moment the ghost of a resolution flitted across his mental vision. "Only this once," he murmured to himself. For thirty years, ever since he had been fifteen years of age, he had served. He was not going to allow his one evening of enjoyment of being served to be spoiled by any resolutions made by the servitor. His eyes lingered on the champagne lovingly. The delicate froth melted, and the rising bubbles, as they burst, set free the imprisoned breath of the vine. He raised the glass and sipped. Then he nodded his head sagely.

"There's no fault to find with your taste in champagne," he remarked to Jessel.

"I thought that we might as well do the thing properly while we were about it," was the reply. In one of his permutations Cornelius had occupied the post of butler in a wine merchant's family, and he had learned something of the niceties of brands and vintages, though in this respect he could not claim to the connoisseurship of Under, whose thirty years' service

in the best families had left him little to learn on the subject.

Under emptied his glass, the attentive waiter refilled it. He lounged back in his chair and drew a long breath of delight. The wine filled him with a pleasant sense of exhilaration. He was quite wide awake now. He looked about him. Here and there at tables were the faces of people he knew; he could count three of his previous employers and a dozen others to whose wants he had at one time or another ministered. He turned to Jessel and began to tell him items of scandal respecting the diners at the other tables. Course followed course. The first bottle of champagne was followed by a second. His tongue tripped a little by the time that was finished. He had entirely forgotten the passage of time, forgotten also that at ten o'clock his master was expecting him. They wound up the dinner with liqueurs, coffee, and cigars. The room had nearly emptied when Jessel paid the bill and they rose to leave.

When they came into the street Under turned to his host.

"The finesh time've ever had in m'life," he remarked. "Never had sush time, ole f'ler."

A clock struck ten. "Had somethin' to do, f'get wa' it was," he remarked.

"Come and have another drink and perhaps you'll remember," said Jessel. He had drunk but sparingly himself.

"Itsh my turn this time," said Under.

He took Jessel's arm, for he found the pavement a little unsteady. The two dropped first into one café, then into a second. The time slipped away. Under grew more incoherent in speech as he poured more drinks down his throat. Jessel thought it time for him to go home. He recalled to Under's befogged intelligence the fact that his employer would be expecting him.

"Tha'sh all ri'," said the valet; "goo' sort, my guv'nor. Let him wait a bit."

Jessel had no intention that Guy should wait any longer. He piloted his charge into the street again. The pavement was rockier than ever. Under lurched and fell into a puddle. When he picked himself up Guy's coat was covered with mud. Guy's hat was also crushed and muddy. Cornelius called a cab and they drove together to the Albany. They had great difficulty in passing the porter at the gate, but Jessel persuaded him to allow them to enter. He piloted his charge to the door of Guy's chambers. There he propped him against the door, and, pressing the electric button, drifted away into the shadows. Unseen himself, he watched the development of his plot. He saw the door open and Under sprawl forward into the entrance-hall. He heard Guy's sharp exclamation of amazement. That was all. The door closed. He waited some minutes longer, half expecting that Under would be thrust out then and there, but as

nothing of the sort happened he betook himself homeward.

"I think you have done for yourself, my good Under," he murmured. "I suppose I had better let the Master know, so that he will be prepared." He felt no compunction at the thought that he had perhaps ruined a fellow-creature. His chief feeling was one of gratification at the artistic manner in which he had carried out his plans, to which was added satisfaction that his patron would pay the expenses of his evening's amusement without a murmur.

Under had indeed "done for himself," as Cornelius had phrased the possible result. Guy had a horror of drunkenness. He had required Under's services that evening, for he was expecting friends to drop in for a smoke and a chat, and possibly a game of bridge. Some of the friends had been there when Under had been precipitated into the entrance-hall on the opening of the door. Guy had felt no pity for the backslider. He saw that it was useless to remonstrate then. Under was hopelessly incapable of speech, or even of holding himself erect. With the aid of one of his friends Guy had carried the man to his room and laid him on his bed. He recognized that the valet had garbed himself in his—Guy's—clothes. He made up his mind to the course he should pursue and carried it out without hesitation.

When Under, pale-faced and shaky, appeared the next morning, Guy said nothing until breakfast was

served and cleared away, then he told the man to pack up his clothes and depart. He would not listen to the excuses Under had ready. He felt that he had done the man more than justice when he paid him a month's wages over and above that due to him, and he breathed more freely when the man had departed.

An hour later there came a ring at his bell. He answered the door personally. Cornelius Jessel stood there.

"Mr. Guy Hora, sir," he asked deferentially.

"What is it?" asked Guy.

Jessel handed him a note. Guy recognized Lynton Hora's handwriting and tore open the envelope. "Dear Guy," he read, "I don't know whether you could do anything amongst any of your friends for the bearer of this missive. He isn't a very prepossessing-looking person, but I know him to be a capable valet, and he is quite sober. Of course, he is stupid, but all servants are that, or they wouldn't be servants. Some years ago he valeted me for a while, and, running up against him in the street the other day, he told me he was out of a berth, and I foolishly promised to see if I could find him one. If you can relieve me of the responsibility, do. When are you coming to see us again? It seems ages since you looked us up, and Myra is crying her eyes out at your absence.—Yours, L. H."

That same evening, while Cornelius was sedately laying out Guy's evening clothes in readiness for his

new employer's return to dress for dinner, Inspector Kenly was learning, almost with dismay, that his literary lodger had that day arrived home, packed his boxes in a hurry, paid a week's rent in lieu of notice, and departed, without giving a hint as to the reason for his sudden departure or whither he was bound.

CHAPTER XV

INSPECTOR KENLY FINDS A CLUE

INSPECTOR KENLY had good cause for regretting the departure of the man whose arrival in his home had been the source of so much annoyance to him, for Cornelius Jessel had become possessed of professional interest to him. His inquiries into the leakage of the information contained in the Foreign Office despatches had at last borne fruit. He had learned that Lynton Hora had been a large speculator for the fall which had taken place upon the publication of the stolen information, and that the Commendatore had netted at least £100,000 as the result. It had been easy to identify the successful speculator with the pseudo-clergyman who had called upon Cornelius Jessel. The detective had counted a great deal upon obtaining useful information about Hora from his lodger.

But the part Hora played in the Stock Exchange panic was not the only item of information which had resulted from his investigations. He had found that a certain Guy Marven had also speculated successfully. The fact that the name was identical with

that of the King's messenger who had carried the decoded despatch from London to Sandringham did not lead him to suspect that Captain Marven could be the culprit. To his mind, the use of the name pointed in another direction altogether. "If the Captain had been in it," he argued, "he would have taken precious good care that his name would never have appeared. It looks as if whoever did the job has used Marven's name in order to throw suspicion upon him."

Deprived of his hope of obtaining any information from Jessel, Inspector Kenly bethought himself of his old friend the hall porter at Westminster Mansions. He began to haunt the place. Indeed, the revival of interest in his old comrade was quite touching. However, the old friend had lived long enough to understand that something more than interest in himself was at work when a busy man like Inspector Kenly should happen to be passing twice in one day, and on each occasion have a whole hour to spend in gossip.

He told the inspector so at last.

Kenly laughed. "You're quite right," he said; "there's not the slightest use in trying to hoodwink an old hand like you. Only you know what it is in the Yard, we are not allowed to take our closest friends into our confidence. I only wish I could tell a man of your intelligence what I'm after." He sighed, as if such a conversation would have been a heartfelt relief.

The hall porter was flattered. "At least you can tell me who it is you are inquiring about," he said.

"I don't know that I ought to do so," replied Kenly dubiously, "but," he added with the air of a man making up his mind to impart a tremendous secret, "I'll risk it, Dwyer; I know that you will treat anything I say as strictly confidential."

"Of course you may. I hope you know me well enough for that," replied Dwyer.

"It's those Hora people on the top floor that I am anxious to find out something about," he remarked.

"The Horas," said the man, and a disappointed look spread over his face. "There can't be anything against them, they are just about the best tenants we've got in the place; been here ten years, too. Now if you'd said the Lorimers or that foxy little chap Griddle I could have understood it."

"Still it is all about the Horas that I want to know," persisted Kenly. "Tell me all about them, Dwyer."

The hall porter did so, and was surprised himself to learn how little he knew about them. There was only one scrap of information which promised to be of any service to the detective. His ears caught the name of Guy. He remembered that Guy Marven had been the name of the other operator.

"The son is named Guy?" he asked. "Does he live at home?"

"Just left us," was the reply. "Gone to live in

the Albany on his own. Let me see, it was three" —he calculated the weeks on his fingers—"no, four weeks ago." Inspector Kenly perceived that the date coincided with that of the speculation.

He thanked his old comrade and strolled thoughtfully across the park and dropped in to Vine Street police station, where he was cordially welcomed by the detective-inspector there on duty.

With him Kenly did not waste any time in preliminaries. When he had discussed one or two matters of official interest he broached his object. "I want to find out something about one of the tenants in the Albany," he remarked; "are any of your people here friendly with the man on the gate?"

"Isn't your card enough?" suggested the local detective.

"No," said Kenly. "It's a very delicate matter. I don't want to appear to be making any special inquiries."

"I had better come along with you myself then," was the prompt response. "I know the old chap pretty well, and I don't think he will try to pull my leg, as he usually does when people ask him questions."

"That sort of man is he?" asked Kenly as they left the police station in company.

"Fly as they make 'em," was the response. "There are usually more than one or two young bloods living there, and when they don't pay up and the writters are after them it takes a smart man to keep them out.

Yet since the present porter has been there not a writ has been served in the place."

He proceeded to give divers illustrations of the gatekeeper's smartness until they arrived at the gate, where Kenly received the introduction he desired. The inspector retired with his new acquaintance into the little hutch with the big glass window, where the gatekeeper kept watch during his hours of duty, and proceeded to put questions. He gave no hint of the object he had in view. In fact, he invented a purely fictitious reason to account for his inquiries, for when professionally engaged the detective had the very faintest respect for the truth, though in private life he would have felt horribly ashamed of the slightest deviation from exact fact. He declared that he suspected a man in Hora's employ of being concerned in some undefined criminal practices.

"Which man—the old one or the new?" asked the gatekeeper promptly.

"The new one," answered Kenly boldly.

"Not surprised to hear it at all," was the answer. "But if you had said the last man, I could have soon told you you were on the wrong track, for, saving the fact that he would lift his elbow too frequently, there was not a scrap of vice in poor James Under."

"I suppose that's why he left?" hazarded Kenly.

"Yes," said the porter. "I wasn't on the gate that night, or I would have seen that he didn't make a fool of himself. He came home, so he told me,

blind to the world, went up to Mr. Hora's chambers, and when in answer to his ring his boss opened the door, he tumbled down inside. So next morning off he went."

"Poor chap," said the inspector. "Do you know where he's to be found? I might put something in his way."

The gatekeeper searched amongst a number of scraps of paper, unearthing one which had an address scribbled upon it. "He left it with me in case I should hear of a berth going," he explained.

"I'll look him up when I have time," said Kenly. He was copying the address into his notebook when the gatekeeper nudged his arm. "Here's the new man," he whispered.

Inspector Kenly looked up, and his surprise was expressed in his strongest exclamation.

"By Henry!" he remarked.

Cornelius Jessel glided through the gate, a model of smiling decorum. Inspector Kenly wheeled round promptly, so that his back was towards the window, nor did he turn again until Jessel's footsteps were no longer audible.

"So he is your man," remarked the gatekeeper curiously.

"He most certainly is my man," replied the detective emphatically.

"From the first time I set eyes on him," declared the porter, "I knew he was a criminal. What has

he been doing? I shouldn't be surprised if it was murder. He walks for all the world like a poisoner."

Inspector Kenly laughed. "At present I cannot say that he is guilty of anything," he remarked. "But I am glad to know that he is somewhere handy when I want to lay my hand upon him. By the way," he added drily, "has your observation of the gait of poisoners been extensive?"

The porter seemed puzzled.

"That's the only gate I know anything about," he answered, nodding his head towards the entrance.

Inspector Kenly smiled. "The gait—the walk of poisoners," he remarked.

"Oh!" said the porter, and a hearty guffaw rolled up from beneath his capacious waistcoat. "If you'd have spoken in plain English I should have understood you. But these new-fangled words——"

Inspector Kenly did not explain. He set himself to amuse his new acquaintance, and succeeded so well that, when an hour later he declared that he must depart, he received a cordial invitation to drop into the hutch whenever he might be passing. He had succeeded better than he had expected; not only had he discovered that his late lodger was in Guy Hora's employment, but he had also been favoured with the opportunity of making acquaintance with Guy's features, for while he had been chatting with the porter Guy had driven up to the gate and entered the building.

The detective began to feel that he had in his hands the threads which, when unravelled, might lead him to some important discovery. The unravelling might require infinite patience, but he was inured to that. There was no detail too small for him to overlook. He went straight from the Albany to the humble lodging in Soho, which was Under's address. He needed all his philosophy. Under was not at home. Kenly waited for him, waited for six hours until the valet came home, walking unsteadily and with a vacant look in his eye. The detective did not speak to him. When the door closed on him he made his own way homewards to Woodbine Cottage.

He was very tired when he laid his head on the pillow, but at eight o'clock the next morning he was inquiring again for Under, and by aid of his most persuasive smile succeeded in winning his way to the room where the valet still lay slumbering heavily.

"Here, wake up, old fellow," the detective shouted cheerily as he closed the door, for the benefit of the landlady who had shown him up to the room.

Under merely moved uneasily. A blind with the grime of years upon it left the room shrouded in gloom. Kenly drew it up and opened the window. It was a bare apartment—a grimy bed, a single chair, a cheap washstand in painted wood with a cracked basin standing upon it, a battered tin box, and a ragged strip of carpet formed the whole of the furniture.

Under stirred as the light of day fell on his face.

He sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes drowsily. Then he caught sight of his visitor and rubbed his eyes again.

"I say, look here," he remarked, when he had come to the conclusion that he was not dreaming, "this is my room, you know."

"That's exactly the reason why I am here," replied Kenly pleasantly.

Under stared more fixedly than before, and as Kenly seemed quite unmoved he remarked—

"Well, really, it is a most awful cheek to come into another man's room without being asked."

"Without being asked?" said Kenly still pleasantly. "You must have a very bad memory, old chap, for your very last words yesterday evening were, 'Don't be a minute later than eight o'clock.'"

"Good Lord!" said Under. "I must have been drunk."

"Not a bit of it," replied Kenly. "You looked as sober as if you had been drinking eight lemon-squashes one after the other."

"I swear I never did that in my life," said the valet fervently. He was wide awake by this time and he sat bolt upright on the bed.

"No, I don't suppose you did last night, or you would not have gone to bed in your boots," remarked Kenly. "But all the same you promised to tell me some interesting facts about your late employer, Mr. Guy Hora, and here I am."

Under stared more than ever. His eyes looked as if they would pop out of his head.

"I—told—you—that I could tell you something about Mr. Hora?" he gasped.

"That's what I have come for," replied the detective.

The valet's amazement found expression at last.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked, "for I'll be hanged if I ever saw you in my life before."

The inspector was enjoying his game of bluff immensely. He played his best card.

"Detective-Inspector Kenly of Scotland Yard," he answered.

At the information Under's mouth opened as wide as his eyes, but the detective observed that there was no tinge of fear in his amazement.

"Well, that is a rum go," remarked the valet when he recovered his speech.

"It most certainly is," replied Kenly. "You tell me that you are in a position to give me important information, you invite me to call, and then you declare that you have entirely forgotten not only your promise, but the man you made it to."

"But I couldn't have made any such promise," declared the valet earnestly, "for I have absolutely nothing to tell. A nicer gentleman I've never had anything to do with than Mr. Hora, and as for knowing anything which could be of interest to the police——" An idea came into his brain. "Look here," he said,

"I suppose Mr. Hora hasn't sent you here to see if I took anything which doesn't belong to me, because if so he's mistaken. I admit I do take a drop too much now and again, though I have fought hard against my little failing, but nobody's ever said as James Under wasn't honest."

There was an emotional throb in the valet's voice, and Kenly hastened to reassure him.

"No," he said. "My call is not in consequence of any charge which has been made against you, it is entirely prompted by a desire to know something of Mr. Guy Hora."

"But I've nothing to tell," the valet asseverated again.

Kenly appeared not to hear him. "Look here, Under," he said, "your mind is wool-gathering this morning. You just have a wash to freshen you up, and then we'll go out and get some breakfast together and have a quiet chat."

The valet found it impossible to combat Kenly's persistence. He did as he was bidden. He brushed his clothes, he arrayed himself in a clean collar, and he meekly preceded the detective down the stairs and walked by his side until they arrived at a tea shop. But there he paused.

"Really, I couldn't look at food this morning," he said.

Kenly saw that he was speaking the truth; the man's shaking hands told their own tale.

"After you've had a pick-me-up you will be able to look your grub in the face," he remarked.

He marched his man off to a chemist's shop, ordered the draught, saw that his patient swallowed it to the last drop, and brought him back again to the tea-shop. He was quite ready for his own breakfast by this time, and he brought a healthy appetite to the demolition of the eggs and bacon which he ordered. Under also, after he had swallowed a couple of cups of tea, found that his appetite had returned. He was morally and physically a better man when the meal was done.

But while it was in progress they talked, or at least Kenly asked questions and Under answered them. The detective learned a great deal during that conversation of Guy's habits and of Guy's friends. There was ample justification to his mind for the ruse he had employed when he heard the one fact that Guy was a frequent visitor at the house of the Marvens. To his mind it seemed that the threads which he held in his hand were unravelling themselves. He was compelled to listen to a full account of the eventful evening which had led up to Under's dismissal. Though amused he was not particularly attentive until the valet mentioned the name of his companion. When he heard that Cornelius Jessel had been the tempter he could barely restrain his eagerness to obtain full particulars. Under was wax in his hands. Kenly learned everything that the valet could tell him of the companion of that disastrous evening. He made no

comment. The threads which seemed almost to be coming loose had of a sudden twisted themselves into an inextricable knot. He took leave of Under shortly afterwards, and as he walked away he muttered to himself, "By Henry if I can make head or tail of the confounded affair!"

Still, he had learned enough to know that Lynton Hora and Guy Hora and Cornelius Jessel were all in some way concerned. Moreover, he began to suspect that a possibility which he had eliminated from his reckoning was within the bounds of credibility. He began to see that his inquiries must include the goings and the comings and the doings of Captain Marven.

CHAPTER XVI

GUY MAKES A RESOLUTION

THE dog days had come and the season was almost moribund when Captain and Mrs. Marven and Miss Challis left town for their country house in Essex, where Guy was to join them a week later, for he had definitely accepted the invitation which had been pressed upon him.

London seemed empty to Guy with their departure. He had made it his business in life to meet Meriel, and latterly not a day had passed without his seeing something of her. If he had not met her with Mrs. Marven at Ranelagh or Hurlingham or in the Park, he had been certain to run against Captain Marven in the club, and he had never refused the Captain's invitation to walk home with him for a cup of tea. At the opera, at dances, there had been always the chance of meeting the girl again, and chance had rarely proved unkind.

But he was not at all easy in his mind. The thought that he had been accepting the hospitality and the friendship of the man whom he had robbed of his trust, the man whose hand was given him in honest

friendship, ever haunted him. Yet the desire to be with Meriel at all hazards overpowered his scruples. He made excuses for himself at first, and, when he perceived that he was trying to cheat himself, the half-formed resolution arose in his mind to so order his life in future as to square it with Meriel's ideals. He realized that it would not be difficult for him to do so, that a life of conventional morality meant a life of ease as compared with existence ordered on the lines of Hora's criminal philosophy. He told himself that his father would appreciate his motives, and, though he might sneer at his decision, yet would accept it. He even persuaded himself that the Commendatore must have intended to suggest that he should break away from the old life when he had persuaded him to take chambers of his own. Yet, though he thus argued with himself, he did not go to Westminster Mansions.

There was another reason for remaining away. The last sentence in the note which Cornelius Jessel had brought him, and which had resulted in the immediate establishment of the shadow now under his own roof, had suggested a new idea to him.

"Myra is crying her eyes out at your absence," the Commendatore had written, and the written words had made him think of Myra in a new light. Myra was not his sister. Sisters do not cry their eyes out at their brothers' absence. Could it be that she cared for him in anything but sisterly fashion? The train

of thought once started made him reflect. He could see now that Myra's demeanour had been different to him in a hundred little particulars during the past few months. The frank, sisterly attitude of her early years had been replaced by something entirely different. When they had been boy and girl together she had been free as the day with him. A girl of moods, subject to hurtling gusts of passion which would pass as swiftly as they came, she had been prone to quarrel with him on the slightest pretext, and as easily to forget the cause of her grievance. But of late—for quite a year past—the attitude of the woman had materially altered from that of the girl. Guy remembered, when he came to reflect, that he had quite ceased to be the objective of any of her explosions of passion, that she had been almost humbly solicitous of his welfare, his comfort, his safety. He remembered her distress when Hora had broached the question of his residing in chambers, her troubled demeanour when any new adventure was projected. He had thought little of these things at the time, but in the clearer vision which was vouchsafed to him through the medium of his own feelings towards Meriel, he began to suspect something of the truth. He had never thought of Myra in the light of anything but a sister. Hardly that even, for Hora had not left him in ignorance of her parentage, and of later years his thought of her had been rather as of a good comrade, trained like himself to wage war with the world. But if she

should have learned to care for him as he had learned to care for Meriel! No, that would be impossible. He put the thought from him, but it recurred. It was the second good reason which kept him away from Westminster Mansions.

He was glad when his week of solitude was over, for a London which did not contain Meriel was an absolute wilderness, peopled only with meaningless shadows. The week had seemed a month—more, a year. But it passed, and the day dawned at last which was to bring them together again under the same roof. The mere contemplation of sleeping beneath the same roof set Guy's blood tingling in his veins. He awoke gay and bright. For a while he would put away all harassing thoughts of the future and drink of the cup of happiness held to his lips.

Even as he lifted the cup, Hora, though absent, dropped a leaf of rue therein which destroyed its sweetness.

Amongst his letters that morning was one from the Commendatore. "You have not been to see us," he wrote, "and Myra is almost in despair. I tell her that youth has its distractions which momentarily make one forgetful of old ties and obligations. She seems to have some sort of fancy that a feminine distraction may be the explanation of your long absence, and is jealous of the unknown, an unphilosophic attitude of mind with which the mere male cannot possibly cope. She cannot be made to understand that pleasure

is evanescent, and that satiety is *avant-courier* to philosophy. I am not surprised that you find your hands full, indeed, I am glad to think that you must be acquiring a rich store of information which will be of the greatest service in our future operations. *En passant*, if you see anything of mine old enemy do your best to cultivate the acquaintance. I have a scheme in my mind which I think may enable me to repay my debt in full. But more of that when we meet. I am in no hurry. Revenge is so sweet a morsel that one rolls it on the tongue instead of bolting it whole, so I'll tell you about my idea when we return to town, for I am going to take Myra away for a few days. She seems a little pale, and sea breezes with companionship (of the other sex) is almost invariably a specific for a sentimental malady. We go to Scarborough to-day, but we shall be back in a fortnight. Let us see you immediately we return."

When Guy laid down the letter the sparkle had gone out of the cup of his enjoyment. He did not conceive that the writer of the letter had been fully conversant with all his plans. He credited Hora with trusting him as fully as he trusted Hora. To imagine that the Commendatore had set a spy upon his movements never entered into his calculations. He had no suspicions that the obsequious Jessel, who waited upon him so attentively, was other than he seemed. So in following the dictates of his heart he felt that he was acting treacherously to his father, while if he were

to fulfil his father's desires he would sink unutterably in his own estimation. Between what he considered his duty and his inclination his mind was in turmoil.

The thought of Meriel expecting him proved the dominant factor in his ultimate decision. While hesitating whether or no to telegraph an excuse for not keeping his appointment, Jessel announced that he was going on with the luggage. At that moment Guy formed the resolution, definitely and absolutely, that he would have done with the past.

The resolution strengthened on his journey. If Lynton Hora could have known the effect which his letter had produced, he might have hesitated before he posted it. But he had only suspected some weakening of Guy's enthusiasm, and he had thought that a reminder would be quite sufficient to recall Guy's errant fancy. Perhaps had he not trained Guy, for his own protection, to so honest a conception of loyalty to his friends, the subtle poison of his letter might have produced the effect he had intended. As it happened, the suggestion Hora had desired to convey that Meriel should be a mere temporary distraction, to be tossed lightly aside when it suited his purpose, never came home to Guy. The further suggestion that Myra was waiting and longing for him did, however, affect him unpleasantly, even though he could truthfully declare that he had never given her reason to imagine that his affection towards her was more than brotherly.

The final suggestion that he should insinuate himself into the confidence of the Marvens in order to minister to Hora's scheme of revenge was, however, the culminating point. His whole nature revolted at the thought. Though by his early training he saw nothing wrong in preying upon the world, instinctively his mind rebelled at the idea of victimizing his friends. Though the world might dub him thief—he would have shrugged his shoulders in amusement at the world's folly in doing so—yet his sense of honour was far keener than that of the majority of those who would have thrown the epithet at him. Captain Marven henceforward should be secure so far as he was concerned. There was no obligation upon him to take upon himself the burden of another man's quarrel, even though that other man were his own father. The philosophic Commendatore himself would necessarily admit the logic of such a decision.

Busied with such thoughts it seemed to Guy that he had hardly entered the cab before it stopped at the railway station. He had no intention of turning back. Jessel was awaiting him on the platform. He saw his master into his seat and retired to another compartment, where he had reserved a corner seat for himself. Guy had given him no instructions to proceed beyond the railway station, so Cornelius decided that he might just as well take it for granted that he was to accompany his master, particularly as Hora had impressed upon him the necessity for

obtaining exact information regarding Guy's relationship with the members of the Marven household. Still busied with his train of ideas, Guy did not bestow another thought upon his valet.

The train wandered but slowly onwards to its destination, far too slowly for Guy's desires; but Whitsea was off the main route to anywhere, and the railway service was the minimum which a sleepy-headed management thought would serve the necessities of the situation. But at last Guy knew that he was nearing his destination. The country stretched out flat on either side of the railway track, unbroken for miles. Through the open window of his compartment entered the cool salt breath of the sea. On his right a gleam of silver shone amidst the green and crimson carpet of the marsh lands. The silver streak broadened. Now it bore a red-winged barge on its bosom, and then there came into view the white wings of a flight of small craft skimming upon the water. Next appeared a cluster of red-tiled, red-brick houses shimmering in the heat. The train drew into a station, a porter roused himself from his afternoon nap and strolled slowly down the platform calling, "Whitsea! Change here for Whitsea!" in a melancholy sing-song. Guy picked up his stick and alighted. Would Meriel come herself to meet him? He had asked the question of himself a hundred times on the journey, and a hundred times had told himself that he expected far too much.

But Meriel was there, and the delight in his heart showed in his eyes as he went forward with outstretched hand to welcome her. Her eyes dropped under his ardent glance and the colour flushed her cheek. Guy had seen no one but Meriel. Another voice recalled his wandering faculties.

"I am just as delighted to welcome you to Whitsea, Mr. Hora, as Meriel can be."

It was Guy's turn to flush as he half turned to meet Mrs. Marven's kindly glance.

"I only saw Miss Challis," he remarked simply.

"That was quite obvious," replied Mrs. Marven, as she took Guy's hand, "and I am inclined to think that if I had been in your place I shouldn't have seen any one else either. She is a pretty picture, isn't she?" There was a tender inflection in her voice which put Guy at his ease.

"There can be no two opinions about that," he answered heartily.

"Auntie would make me vain if I were not so already," said the girl demurely, as she thrust her arm in Mrs. Marven's. "If you'll just tell the porter which is your luggage, he will see that it is sent on. We are not more than half a mile from the station, and we thought you would like to walk to the Hall."

"Nothing could suit me better," declared Guy.

They strolled along the platform, talking. Guy's kit-bag and dressing-case were tossed out on the platform, and Jessel was already mounting guard over

them. Guy did not recognize his servant until he was close to him. His surprise was apparent in the tone of his voice.

"Hullo, Jessel!" he said, "what on earth are you doing here?"

The man touched his hat. "Beg your pardon, sir," he said, "didn't you intend me to come? You said nothing, so of course——"

Guy interrupted him. "I thought I had told you. But it doesn't matter; just see that the porter has my luggage all right. You can get the next train back."

He turned away. Cornelius touched his hat. His face expressed disappointment. Mrs. Marven observed his fallen countenance and came to the rescue.

"I ought to have told you to bring your man with you," she remarked to Guy; "and unless you have something you want him to do for you, you had better let him come to the Hall. I know that the Captain's man will be delighted that you have brought him, for I don't mind telling you now that he detests valeting any one but his own master."

With a word of thanks Guy dismissed the subject from his thoughts. He was supremely indifferent to Jessel's presence. Meriel was beside him. Nothing else mattered.

CHAPTER XVII

STAR-DUST

WHITSEA lies on the estuary of one of those Essex rivers which flow into the North Sea through a wilderness of shallows. The visitor who goes to it expecting to find any single one of the ordinary attractions of the average seaside watering-place may make up his mind to be woefully disappointed. But the visitor with a delight in the unconventional and the unhackneyed, need not fear boredom. The salt marshes which border the river for miles have a wild beauty entirely their own. Flowers grow there as if the sea were no enemy to them. Then the six miles of sheltered water, which lies between Whitsea and the sea, gives protection from wild weather which the yachtsman is not slow to appreciate. So when the days begin to lengthen the Whitsea river begins to be alive with sailing craft, and when the summer days really come it has a population which lives entirely upon the water.

At Whitsea the Hall was the most prominent residence, even as Captain Marven was the most distinguished inhabitant. It was just a simple, kindly

English house, at one with its simple, kindly English inhabitants. The life there was a revelation to Guy. Never before had he known what it was to be an inmate of a pure, unpretentious English country home.

"You will find us dull, I am afraid," had been Mrs. Marven's warning when she had invited him; "for except sailing, and later in the year a little rough shooting, Whitsea has no attractions."

Dull? Guy had never found life so full. Every moment of the day provided a new item of interest.

The house itself was a haven of peace. The long, low, white stone structure stood on a little knoll, looking, with all its many eyes, in the face of the southing sun. It was girt about with an old garden, where the scent of roses disputed with the perfume of carnations for supremacy, a garden where tall white lilies stood sentinel over serried ranks of sweet peas, and gazed down unmoved upon the riot of colours that filled the borders. Beyond the garden a meadow dropped into the saltings, and beyond the saltings the sea-wall kept the tides at bay, and ever the sweet, fresh breezes dinted the surface of the water and lifted the petals of the roses and whispered stories of the ocean in the ears of those who walked in the garden, tempting them to venture forth in search of the places where they were born.

Daily two of the inmates of the Hall responded to the temptation. Meriel loved the sea. Guy was equally fervent in his adoration, and there, ever before

them, was the means of gratifying their desires in the shape of the graceful ten-ton cutter, *Witch*, lying in her moorings opposite the house, or the rightly christened little eighteen-footer, *Dainty*, which ever seemed to chafe at the chain which saved her from going adrift. Oftentimes Captain Marven made one of the party, more occasionally Mrs. Marven accompanied them, but there were occasions when Meriel and Guy found themselves alone. Then, when the breeze sang in Guy's ears, and the spray tasted salt on his lips, he felt a mad impulse to sail on and on with his precious cargo, right away out of the old life into a totally new one.

The two young people were drawn very close together in those days. Meriel took no pains to conceal the pleasure she found in Guy's companionship. Guy made no effort to disguise the fact that life held only one hope for him. If there was a doubt at the back of his mind that the hope was foredoomed to be disappointed, he put it away. He would be happy while he might. Sorrow was for the sad days of autumn. There was only one jarring note in the symphony, it was a trifling one and did not affect Meriel. On the first day they went for a sail they passed an excellently appointed steam yacht lying at anchor in the fairway of the river. A figure, immaculately clad in blue jacket and white flannels, raised a bridge-cap as they passed.

"Hildebrand Flurscheim, by all that's holy!" remarked Guy.

"Still searching for his missing picture," said Meriel, laughing.

The thought was an unpleasant one; but Guy was not allowed to forget it. Flurscheim found out that the Marvens were at their house, and he called, and, undeterred by a cool reception, called again. Guy could not help but realize that if his host and hostess had been aware that he was the burglar who had raided the connoisseur's treasure-house, the coolness accorded Flurscheim would be nothing to the reception he might expect.

But Captain and Mrs. Marven would have both been horrified at the mere suggestion that Guy could be guilty of such a deed. They were fully cognizant of the love story developing under their eyes, acquiescing smilingly. They anticipated an idyll. They had watched Guy carefully, and they had seen no fault in him. He had an unblemished university career, and was apparently sufficiently endowed with this world's goods. He seemed chivalrous, honourable, and, above all, deeply in love. Thinking of the days of their own wooing, they anticipated a happy union.

A week passed, the second week was near its end, when a shadow was cast on the sunlight of Guy's happiness, and again the gloom was produced by a letter from Hora, forwarded to him from his chambers.

"We shall be home on the Monday," wrote the Commendatore. "Please come and see me on the Tuesday at latest, for I have now completed my plans,

and nothing remains but to put them into execution. Again let me remind you to do your best to cultivate the Marven people if the opportunity arises. Any knowledge you may acquire concerning them is likely to prove useful."

Guy took the letter with him into the open, where he tore it into tiny fragments and scattered them to the breeze. Cornelius Jessel, from Guy's bedroom window, watched the flying fragments longingly. So also did another man, who, seated on the sea-wall some hundred yards away, was just near enough to realize what Guy was doing. But neither Cornelius nor the stranger made any efforts to recover the fragments. Detective-Inspector Kenly had no desire to call attention in so pointed a fashion to the fact that he was visiting Whitsea.

Guy was unaware of the dual observation, even as Jessel was unaware that his late landlord was so near to him. His action was merely prompted by an outbreak of anger at the despicable part he was expected to play. He did not at first remember that he had not told the Commendatore of his projected visit. His anger passed, for he thought that the expectation was founded on a misapprehension. But the reiteration of Hora's intention, his renewal of the belief that he, Guy, would be as ready as heretofore to participate in the carrying out of his plans, warned Guy that he must no longer delay coming to an explanation with the Commendatore. Hora had named a date.

That date would suit Guy as well as any other. It would not be fair to his father to delay any longer.

Guy was unusually silent that morning, and when Meriel joined him she was surprised that he should be so preoccupied. She feared to rally him on the subject, for she suspected a reason for his preoccupation which she would not name to herself.

They went aboard the *Witch* about nine o'clock. There was a fair wind from the north, the tide had just begun to ebb, and there was every promise of an ideal day. Gradually Guy's preoccupation melted away. It was impossible to remain preoccupied on a brilliant summer morning in Meriel's presence. By the time they had cast off their moorings he was chattering away as freely as ever. Hora was forgotten for a while. He was remembered later.

"I must be going back to town on Tuesday," Guy said, in reply to a suggestion of some proposed trip for the ensuing week.

"Going back to town!" remarked Meriel. There was more than surprise, there was regret in her tone.

"I shall hate to do so," said Guy; "but I had a letter from my father this morning, and he particularly wishes to see me."

Guy's voice had unconsciously hardened as he spoke. His brow was knitted and his lips were compressed. He looked up and he caught sight of a something in her eyes which chased away the frown.

"Of course you must go, then," said Meriel.

Guy responded to the regretful note in the girl's voice.

"You will be sorry to lose me?" he asked eagerly.

The ghost of a blush fluttered for a moment on her cheeks.

"We shall all be very sorry," she answered equivocally. Guy was about to press the personal question home, but the sails shivered. Meriel glanced upward. "Give me the tiller," she said; "you are steering awfully badly this morning. Why, you've let the *Witch* run right up into the wind."

Guy laughed as he vacated his post at the helm. For the moment he was satisfied. He had seen an answer in Meriel's eyes to his unspoken question which set his mind at rest. Before the day was out that question should be answered, but the time was not yet.

The *Witch* flew along, bending over to the breeze. The river widened and the banks fell away. The cutter began to curtsy to the waves, and now and again a spatter of spray was tossed high in the air. Guy took the tiller again and Meriel unpacked the luncheon basket. With appetites sharpened by the breeze they picknicked on deck. They still pressed onward, until the houses on the white cliff before them began to be plainly visible. Meriel looked at her watch.

"We are very near Clacton and it is two o'clock," she remarked. "Isn't it time we thought about returning?" she added regretfully.

The summer breeze began to show a disposition to change, veering to the east. Guy put the helm down and went about. The wind veered still more, though it still held. Guy gave the mainsail more sheet and the *Witch* ran merrily before the breeze over the slackening tide. An hour passed and the wind became perceptibly lighter. The afternoon sun shone down from a cloudless sky, while a purple heat haze gathered on the horizon.

"Luckily we turned back when we did," said Meriel. "We shall hardly get home on the tide even now. Hadn't we better set the spinnaker?"

Guy acceded to the request. The breeze freshened again, and for another hour the water rippled musically under their bows. Then the breeze died away completely.

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "There's nothing for it but a policy of masterly inaction," he said. "Don't you think it is time for a cup of tea?"

He relinquished the tiller to his companion, and dived below to light the stove and place the kettle upon it. By the time the kettle boiled an absolute calm had fallen; the sea might have served as a mirror, the sails hung straight and still, the heat had become almost oppressive.

Neither Meriel nor Guy were troubled. They were together, and although the boat seemed motionless they were drifting homewards. Guy especially was in no anxiety to return. Tea drunk and the cups

washed and put away, Guy brought cushions from the cabin, and made a comfortable couch on deck for Meriel, while he sat by the helm looking down upon her.

Their talk became personal. Meriel's confidences were those of a pure-hearted girl, and Guy, listening, longed to repay confidence with confidence. If he only dared! But his risks were too great. How could this pure girl be brought to comprehend his point of view? Yet he knew that some day he must make the effort. Perhaps, if she cared enough for him, she might strive to understand. If she cared enough! Yes, that was the whole question. Her views were so totally opposed to those which he had imbibed from his earliest youth, those which he knew now to be hopelessly wrong—not through any intellectual conviction, but merely by his intuition of what would be his companion's attitude towards them. He would make her understand how he came to have held such views and where they had led him. But not if she did not care. He could not win her under false pretences. She must know all about him, exactly what he was, the hidden life which none save Lynton Hora and Myra knew. Yet first he must know if she did care for him, otherwise such confidence would be treachery to Hora. His thoughts constrained him to silence. When his replies became monosyllabic Meriel, looking up, saw that his countenance had become overcast. She too became silent.

The boat drifted.

Meriel lay back on the cushions, her eyes half closed. She wondered what thought could be troubling her companion. She glanced up again and met his eyes.

"Something is troubling you," she demanded suddenly.

"Yes, something is troubling me," answered Guy moodily.

With an impulsive gesture the girl held out her hand. Guy grasped it. The little sunbrowned hand was not withdrawn.

"Can I help?" she asked quietly.

"I cannot tell," he replied. "Until——" The moment had arrived when he felt that he must give utterance to his thoughts or remain for ever silent. He braced himself to the effort. His voice was almost harsh.

"Meriel," he said. She started at the sound of her name on his lips. "Meriel——" he paused.

There was no coquetry in her nature. She understood the unspoken thought as clearly as if it had been vocalized in a flood of eloquence.

"Guy," she answered shyly.

The one musical syllable was sufficient. Their glances met. Each read in the other's eyes the words they longed to hear. Lips closed on lips.

The sun shone down fiercely. The boat drifted.

"Then you do care for me?" Guy asked presently.

"Do I care?" Meriel looked happily into his face. "If any one were to tell you that the sea had become dry, you might sooner believe the tale than that I should have ceased to care for you."

"That is love," said Guy. "I know, for my love for you is also greater than the ocean."

She was seated beside him. One hand was on the tiller, the other encircled her waist, and she leaned her head on his shoulder with a sigh of content. The westering sun was dropping to the horizon, and on the path of gold it painted on the waters the boat still drifted. Was this to be the omen of their future lot? In his rapture Guy thrust away all disturbing memories. He loved and he was beloved. Nothing could alter that one fact. The whole world was transformed for him. The sun dropped lower still. A rosy flush crept into the sky. The sea, unflecked by a single ripple, glowed with opal fires. Nothing broke the stillness. Meriel, too, lived her brief hour in love's fairyland.

The boat still drifted. The mouth of the Whitsea river was narrowing in upon them. The sea-wall stood up blackly against the pellucid sky. The sun went down behind the purple bank of mist. The colours faded. The sweet, grey calm of summer twilight spread its mantle over the water. From somewhere on the shore a sandpiper called to his mate.

Meriel awoke to reality with a start.

"We shall never make our moorings to-night, Guy," she cried. "It must be eight o'clock, and we are quite four miles from home."

"I should be quite content, dear," he answered, "to drift along for ever."

"You would tell another tale when you came to examine our store of provisions," she answered merrily.

Guy looked at his watch. "The tide will run for another half-hour," he said. "No; unless a breeze should spring up, the *Witch* will never make Whitsea to-night."

"We shall have to leave her," answered Meriel promptly.

"Why not wait for the next tide?" urged Guy.

"No; auntie will be so anxious," the girl replied. "If we drop anchor here and stow away comfortably we can easily row home in the dinghy."

Guy stood up and glanced round the horizon. The air was perfectly still. There was not a movement in the sails.

"We'll let her drift so long as the tide makes, and meanwhile I'll make things snug," said Guy. The blocks creaked musically as he gathered in foresail and jib. The topsail fluttered to the deck. It was warmer work getting in the mainsail and darkness was gathering rapidly. But the canvas was stowed away at last, the halliards made fast, every rope coiled away in its place.

"The tide is on the turn," said Meriel. "If we can

edge in a little nearer the south shore the *Witch* will lie as safely as she would on her moorings."

Guy hauled up the chain and cast the anchor loose. "When you are ready, dear," he said.

"You may let go," she cried a minute later. The anchor dropped with a heavy splash, and the rattle of the chain, as Guy paid it out, seemed almost a desecration of the silence. When the anchor held Guy once more went below to trim and light the riding lamp. By the time his job was finished and the lamp was swung, the sky had gained a deeper tint of blue and the stars had begun to sparkle. He drew the dinghy alongside and held out his hand to Meriel.

"You must let me take one oar," she said as she stepped into the boat. "It will be a stiff pull against the tide."

"When I am tired I'll tell you," he answered. He looked regretfully at the cutter as he dipped his oars.

"It seems ungracious to leave her," he said, "since the happiest moments of my life have been passed aboard her."

"Good old *Witch*," replied Meriel softly.

Night's mantle of darkness and silence enwrapped them. The stars studded the moonless sky, the plunk of the oars in the rowlocks and the drip of the water from the blades alone disturbed the perfect stillness. The boat drove onwards, leaving a trail of light in its wake. The darkness had made yet another of nature's

marvels manifest. The water was full of phosphorescent light. Guy rested on his oars. Meriel lifted a handful of water and poured it back into the sea. It was as if she had poured out a handful of gems. She threw a handful of the diamonds in the air, and every gem as it fell again into the water struck gleams of light from the surface. They leaned over the side of the boat, and here and there in the blackness the lights sparkled for a moment and were hidden again.

"The water is full of star-dust," said Meriel. "See!" she added eagerly. Guy followed the direction of her outstretched finger.

A phantom form lighting its way beneath the surface sailed by, a myriad of the sparkling points accompanying it.

"Even the sea has its spirits," she remarked.

"On a night like this it is possible to idealize even a jellyfish," he answered whimsically.

He took again to the oars. Few words were spoken between them.

They came at last to their landing-place. Guy made the boat fast and joined Meriel on the bank. He clasped her lightly in his arms. "Tell me you love me, Meriel," he demanded almost fiercely.

Her assurance was whispered only, but Guy recognized an intensity as great as his own. He held her closely to him.

"I have something to say," he told her. "I cannot ask you to marry me," the words were wrung from

him, "until I have told you something about myself which you do not suspect."

She did not move in his embrace. He could see her eyes shining in the darkness.

"Nothing you could tell me would make any difference, Guy," she answered.

A sharp pain stabbed his heart. "I am not worthy, Meriel," he said. "And I fear that to-morrow you will tell me so."

"As if it were possible," she answered.

"I have been very happy to-day," he continued. "Such happiness cannot last. When you know what I am in reality you will be glad to forget me."

This was more than the detraction of the ardent lover. Meriel realized that there was the note of real suffering in his voice. She waited almost with dread for him to continue. And Guy was upon the point of pouring out his whole story. But the chance passed; a voice hailed them from the lawn of the Hall.

"Is that you, Meriel?"

"Auntie is watching for our return," she said shyly. "Come."

Guy followed her along the path to the house.

"To-morrow," he said, and she understood.

CHAPTER XVIII

CORNELIUS JESSEL DREAMS OF A FORTUNE

THE morning was heavy with an almost unnatural calm. By nine o'clock the sun's rays glowed with the intensity of noon. The flowers drooped their heads and the leaves hung listlessly. Cornelius Jessel passing out of the back way from the Hall on his way to the post-office had not covered a dozen yards before he paused to mop his brow with his handkerchief. He bore with him the letter in which Guy announced to Hora his intention of returning to town. It was the briefest of notes, disclosing nothing of the intention of the writer. But it was not the only letter which Jessel carried. In the other envelope was the report which the shadow-man had penned to the Master. The envelope was stamped and sealed, but Cornelius took it from his pocket and looked at it and frowned. He replaced it in his pocket and proceeded on his way. He did not know whether to post it or not. For the first time since he had undertaken the part of spy upon Guy's actions he had wilfully suppressed an item of information which had come into his possession concerning Guy. It was such an im-

portant item of information too. So important that he had gasped for breath when he realized what the discovery he had made really meant.

On the previous afternoon and evening he had taken advantage of Guy's absence to make a careful examination of his master's property. He had frequently done so before, but without discovering anything of any interest. But on this occasion he was more fortunate. He had long been curious concerning the contents of a little silver-bound box which reposed in a corner of Guy's dressing-case. He had oftentimes made discreet attempts to pick the lock, but without success, and he dared not venture on forcing it lest by damaging the box he should excite suspicion. He guessed that, sooner or later, he would get the opportunity he desired for examining the contents of the little casket, and the occasion had arrived at last. Guy had left his keys on the dressing-table, and one of the bunch fitted the lock.

When the lid was opened Cornelius, at first sight of the contents, gave a sniff indicative of disgust. He saw a little lace handkerchief, a glove, an opera programme, a few withered rose leaves, and an infinite contempt for the young man he served swept over him. There was no trace of sentiment hidden away in the heart of Cornelius. But when he tossed the trumpery aside he drew a long breath of surprise. Beneath the valueless trifles was concealed an article of price—a little golden frame enclosing an exquisite

miniature on ivory of a girl with a wealth of fair hair, the painting surrounded with a circlet of brilliants. At first he did not grasp the significance of the discovery. The likeness of the miniature to Meriel Challis seemed to him a full explanation as to why it should be in his employer's possession. But as he turned the frame over in his hand, counting the stones in the setting, weighing the trinket delicately on two fingers to estimate the weight of the gold, he remembered that somewhere he had seen a description of some such article. Where? He had not to rack his brain very long before he was able to recall where he had seen the miniature described. Like many another person, who longs for the prize without incurring the attendant risks, Cornelius had assimilated every detail which had been made public concerning the Flurscheim robbery. His mouth had watered at the published description of the stolen articles, and now here—if he was not greatly mistaken—was one of them in his own hand.

At the heels of this thought came another which almost made his heart cease beating. £5000 reward! £5000 had been offered for such information as would lead to the conviction of the thief and to the recovery of the stolen property. Five—thousand—pounds! £5000 was lying waiting for him, Cornelius Jessel. Yet, dazzled as he was by the prospect of the acquisition of such wealth, he hesitated a long while before he could persuade himself to make use of the informa-

tion which had come into his possession. It was the thought of the Master which gave him pause. In view of the discovery which he had made he began to be timorous. He could no longer believe that the Master's interest in Guy Hora was the interest of the hawk in the pigeon. Dimly he began to comprehend that, unknowingly, he was being used as pawn in a game which he did not comprehend. Supposing, then, that any effort of his own to secure that £5000 should run counter to any plan of the Master's? He shivered at the thought, for he had a very real fear of the Master's capacity for mischief. He had locked the miniature and the glove and the rose leaves away again, and set his wits to work to discover a plan by which he might obtain the £5000 without the fact that he was the informer being disclosed to anybody. The more he pondered upon the subject the more convinced he became that fortune was within his grasp. He could not have made the discovery at a more opportune moment. He was in the country surrounded by a lot of simple country folk, and within reach was the victim of the burglary, the man who had offered the reward. What better plan could be conceived than that of taking his information straight to the fountain-head? He would then be able to make his own terms. But he saw that it would be necessary to have some proof of the correctness of his statements. He paid another visit to Guy's dressing-case after providing himself with a pencil and oiled paper. With these he made a series

of tracings of the miniature, and, clumsy as they were, yet he trusted that they might be clear enough for identification. Thus provided, he determined to take the first opportunity afforded him of communicating with Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim.

The determination carried with it, as a necessary corollary, the decision to keep his discovery concealed from everybody, particularly from the Master. He would have felt quite easy in his mind if he could have assured himself that the Master was not already acquainted with the fact that Guy possessed the miniature. On the other hand, Cornelius argued that it was quite possible that the man who was paying him to keep a watch upon Guy might be actuated by dread of a confederate playing him false. That was a strong reason why he should not postpone communicating with Flurscheim. The reward would go to the first in the field with the information. Then, if the Master were implicated and if he should be captured, Cornelius saw safety for himself. Therefore, when he wrote his daily report of Guy's movements to the Master, he entirely omitted to mention the momentous discovery he had made; and yet so terrified was he that he should bring his employer's vengeance upon himself by his failure to report it, that a dozen times on the way to the post-office he drew the letter from his pocket and looked at it, and considered whether he should not reopen the envelope and add the information which he had suppressed.

Even when he had dropped the letter into the box he nearly entered the post-office to ask for it back again, and only prevented himself from doing so by declaring to himself that it would be easy to give the information thereafter if circumstances pointed to the desirability of his doing so. But once the letter was posted Cornelius became bolder. The posting of the letter was in the nature of a definite act committing him to a definite policy. It was no use looking back, especially with the prospect of £5000 to be earned by merely speaking a few words. He forgot the heat. He walked briskly away from the post-office towards the little embankment which Whitsea village proudly designated "the Front."

It seemed hotter than ever there. The tide was low, and the air shimmered in the heat reflected from the silvery banks of mud. He placed his hand on the stone parapet of the low wall and drew it back hastily. The stone was nearly hot enough to have blistered his hand. He looked out on the river. Almost opposite him was Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim's yacht, and, if Cornelius's eyes were to be trusted, Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim himself was reclining beneath an awning on the deck. The opportunity was too good to be missed. Cornelius looked around for a boatman to put him aboard. There was none visible, and he could not muster up courage to hail the yacht. The Whitsea Hotel showed an inviting open door just handy. Cornelius felt suddenly thirsty. He accepted the in-

vitation of the open door, and while he quenched his thirst with a bottle of iced ginger-beer—with something in it—he made known his desire to be put aboard Mr. Flurscheim's yacht to the barmaid.

Before the words were well out of his mouth a man who had followed Cornelius into the hotel remarked, "I'll put you aboard the boat with pleasure, Mr. Jessel."

Jessel's first impulse was to fly. To be suddenly accosted by name when, so far as he knew, there was no one in Whitsea except the servants at the Hall who could be aware of his identity, was disconcerting, to say the least. He stifled the impulse as best he could, and, turning on his heel, faced the speaker. He saw a pleasant, open-faced man of fifty or thereabouts holding out his hand.

"Didn't expect to see me here, eh, any more than I expected to have the pleasure of meeting you? But the world's a little place, and this sort of weather, if one is likely to knock up against old acquaintances, there's no spot more likely than where you find a pretty girl mixing long drinks with a lot of ice in 'em. That's right, isn't it, miss?"

The barmaid giggled.

"A slice of lemon, a bottle of Schweppe, a lump of ice, and a suspicion of white satin, if you please," he said before turning again to Jessel and continuing volubly, "You don't recognize me, eh? Well, I'm not surprised, for now I come to think of it we haven't

exchanged more than a dozen words in our lives. My name's Kenly."

"Oh!" Cornelius remembered, and immediately felt easy in his mind. He had no reason for dreading his late landlord.

He took the proffered hand.

"This is a surprise," he said. "Who would ever have expected to meet you here?"

"The same to you," said Kenly. He pointed to Jessel's glass. "Drink up and have another, and tell me how you are getting on," he said. "The missis will be pleased to hear, for she's always telling me that she's never likely to have such a nice gent in the house to do for, and she's always cracking on about your being obliged to leave, and how certain she is never to get another like you."

Cornelius smiled and emptied his glass. "Well, as you insist——" he said.

"Another of the same," said Kenly affably.

"And what brings you down here?" asked Cornelius.

"Taking my holidays," remarked Kenly expansively. "This is just the sort of place that suits me—no sand, no niggers, plenty of fresh air and sunshine, a boat to potter about in, and a drop of the right sort to drink when you're thirsty: that's the place that suits me down to the ground, so I'm here. I suppose you're down for a change too?"

"Not exactly," replied Cornelius. "I have to com-

bine business and pleasure too." He took a long draught of the fresh brew which the barmaid handed to him, and, assuming his most important air, he changed the topic.

"I suppose Mrs. Kenly is with you?"

"Not much," answered the detective, with a broad wink. "I know a bit too much to bring the missis on a holiday, and, if you were married, you'd understand."

Cornelius laughed and glanced at the barmaid. "You can't tell me anything," he said.

"No," answered Kenly. "Half the bachelors to-day know more than the married people, and that's a fact, ain't it, miss?"

The barmaid giggled again. "You're a caution," she said. The conversation progressed swimmingly, and ten minutes later Cornelius embarked on a dinghy, having graciously allowed Kenly to put him aboard Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim's yacht. He lounged in the stern, assuming his most important air while Kenly pulled away at the oars. He was fully alive to the fact that he would create a much better impression going aboard thus than if he had been compelled to borrow a boat and pull himself out to the yacht.

Kenly ran him up alongside, steadied the boat by the side of the ladder, and then let his dinghy drop astern to a sufficient distance to allow him to observe Cornelius introduce himself to Flurscheim. He saw

that the two men were strangers, and he gathered that the connoisseur was annoyed at Jessel's invasion of his privacy. He saw the connoisseur jump up suddenly at something which was said and begin to pace the deck in manifest agitation. He saw Jessel standing unmoved, and then, after a brief conference, both men went down the companion into the saloon.

The detective immediately realized that there was a chance of his learning what errand had taken Jessel to the yacht. Half a dozen strokes took him alongside again, and, making his painter fast to the yacht's anchor-chain, he stood up in the dinghy as it drifted level with an open port. As he had suspected, the port-hole gave upon the saloon, and as the dinghy came opposite he could hear two voices in excited colloquy. One was easily recognizable as Jessel's, and the other Kenly had just as little difficulty in recognizing as Flurscheim's.

"Is that anything like the face on one of your missing miniatures?" said Jessel.

"I could swear to it," said Flurscheim.

"And the portrait—is it like any one you know?" asked the valet.

"You've seen it," cried the Jew eagerly; "you must have done; for the miniature is so like Miss Challis that she might have sat for the portrait."

"I have seen it, and I can tell you where it is at the present moment," answered the valet.

"Where? Where?" cried the Jew eagerly.

"You don't expect me to tell you straight away, do you?" asked Jessel in an injured tone.

The Jew took no notice. "And the other boxes and the picture—can you tell me where my Greuze is?"

"No, I can't, at least not at present," said the valet coolly; "but I reckon that if once I put you on the track of one of the things that has been stolen, it won't be my fault if you don't find out where the rest of 'em are."

"Well, well," said Flurscheim impatiently, "tell me where the miniature is."

There was silence, and the detective listened impatiently.

"Have you lost your tongue?" demanded Flurscheim angrily.

"What about the reward that you offered?" said Jessel. "Five thousand pounds, wasn't it, for such information as shall lead to the conviction of the thieves or the recovery of the stolen property?"

"You shall have the reward all right," said Flurscheim impatiently.

"I'm not misdoubting your word," said Jessel, "but in cases like this it's better to 'ave everything in black and white. 'Ave it in black and white, that's my motto."

Kenly heard the connoisseur give a grunt of disgust, and he smiled. He could even hear the scratching of a pen on paper. Then Flurscheim's voice remarked sharply—

"Mind, I'll give nothing to any confederate in the robbery. If you have had anything to do with it, and will make a clean breast of the matter, I'll do my best for you; but I'm not going to be blackmailed by any d——d thief."

The detective smiled again at the injured tone of Jessel's reply. "I'm a respectable man, Mr. Flurscheim, though I am a poor one, an' the hinformation 'as come to me quite unexpected like. If I was rich I'd be 'appy to tell you all I know for the cause of justice; but, being only poor, I've my old age to think of."

"Well, I only warned you, that's all," grumbled Flurscheim.

"Which there was no need," added Cornelius, with dignity. "And there's another matter," he added, and now the detective could detect a note of anxiety in his voice. "There's them as is connected with this job that won't stick at nothing to get even with them as gives 'em away, if they has so much as a hint as to who done it. You'll have to give me your word of honour as a gentleman as you'll not so much as mention my name, or my life'll not be worth two pennorth of gin."

This time Flurscheim was silent awhile before he replied.

"If I don't know your name, it is not possible for me to mention it."

"You can easy find out," answered Jessel, "when I tell you what I have to tell you."

"I promise," replied Flurscheim shortly.

Jessel dropped his voice, but, low as it was, the detective's keen ears overheard every word of the information which was imparted. He was thunderstruck at the intelligence that a part of the stolen property was in the possession of Guy Hora. He could not conceive the motive which had prompted Jessel to disclose the fact, even if it were true. He wanted time to arrange his ideas on the subject. But he listened eagerly to every word that passed. He missed not a word of the long conversation that ensued when Jessel had imparted the information he possessed. He drank in all Flurscheim's questions and all the valet's answers, and was so anxious to lose nothing of what passed that he had barely time to cast the boat loose and drift astern when he heard them rise to leave the saloon. Still he presented a picture of perspiring innocence when he pulled up alongside to take his late lodger back to the quay.

Cornelius was obviously elated. "Sorry to 'ave kept you so long, Kenly," he remarked. "But I 'ad to wait for an answer to something. We must have another drink."

They had it, and the detective learned that Cornelius was expecting to return to town the following day.

CHAPTER XIX

INSPECTOR KENLY REPORTS

ALTHOUGH Cornelius had been entirely unaware of the fact, his late landlord had arrived at Whitsea by the same train as himself, and had been keeping a sharp eye on him, and, if it were possible, a still sharper eye on Guy Hora. But Kenly's observation had been unproductive until the time when he obeyed the impulse to make himself known to Jessel. He had been impelled to do so by sheer desperation at having passed, from a professional point of view, one of the most unprofitable fortnights of his life. He had not anticipated any remarkable revelations when he had followed Cornelius into the hotel bar, and when he finally bade his old tenant good-bye he had no need to force a spice of heartiness into the greeting.

Directly Jessel left him he felt the necessity for rearranging all his theories, but at the same time he was equally alive to the desirability of getting to work upon the new clue which was in his possession There was now nothing to keep him in Whitsea. He had learned of Guy's intention to return to London

the following day, and he determined to be in town before him. There would be plenty of time to decide upon the best course to pursue during the journey.

He went into the hotel, packed his bag and paid his bill in a desperate hurry, for the hotel omnibus was at the door.

He caught his train, and was thankful to find so few people travelling that he could get a compartment to himself. He could marshal his ideas better in solitude. Still, arrange them and rearrange them as he might, he could get no nearer a reasonable explanation of the relationship of the various parties who had become objects of his suspicion. The only theory which seemed at all tenable was that the Horas, father and son, Theophilus Jessel, and Captain Marven were all members of a gang of criminals who operated in perfect safety by reason of the social position of the principals. But in such case Kenly could not understand the motive of the elaborate plot by means of which Theophilus had secured for himself his place in Guy's service. Nor could he comprehend why Captain Marven's name should have been used in regard to the Stock Exchange operations which had followed upon the acquisition of the knowledge contained in the despatches. To Kenly, that seemed such a gratuitous piece of folly as to be entirely unworthy of the audacious persons who had planned and carried out the Flurscheim coup.

Like a wise man, he ceased after a while to trouble

himself with inventing explanations to fit theories. He knew very well that once all the facts were in his hands an explanation would be easy enough to find, and he was anxious to get some additional facts. Was not that the motive which had made him decide to leave Whitsea in such a hurry? He knew very well that Guy was not carrying the stolen picture about with him, and he had learned quite enough about Whitsea Hall to be quite assured in his own mind that the picture was not likely to be reposing there. He had, however, become sufficiently acquainted with Lynton Hora's mode of life from his friend the hall porter of Westminster Mansions to warrant the assumption that the Greuze was hidden somewhere in Lynton Hora's flat. If he could only get an opportunity to verify his suspicion before any of the persons he suspected were alarmed, he saw an opportunity of bringing off a coup which would provide a startling dénouement to the sensational Flurscheim burglary. The thought ran away with him to such an extent that he allowed himself to taste the sweets of success. He imagined himself reading the references in the newspapers to "the smart work of that able officer, Detective-Inspector Kenly." He imagined himself listening to the commendations of the judge when the prisoners at the bar had been sentenced to various terms of penal servitude, and—he awoke to the bustle of Liverpool Street railway station, limp with perspiration, still undecided as to the best manner of setting

about getting the evidence he needed, and perforce compelled to leave circumstances to guide his course of action.

He permitted himself the luxury of a cab to Scotland Yard, where he proposed to deposit his bag and report himself. He had another reason for calling at headquarters. He foresaw that very shortly the moment might arrive when he would not be able to deal with the situation single-handed. If all the parties whom he expected to be implicated in the two affairs were to be kept under surveillance he would need assistance, and he was not quite certain whether that moment had not already arrived when some such steps were necessary. Then Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim might at any moment communicate with the Yard, and Inspector Kenly did not want any one else to be put on the job without his knowledge. He knew that as he had previously had the investigation in hand, if he reported himself back in town he would be communicated with in the event of any fresh information coming to hand, even though he was detailed for special service on the Foreign Office affair, and thereby relieved of the obligation to render daily reports of his work to his own department.

He was glad that he had determined to report himself, for he found awaiting him a pressing message from the Permanent Secretary, asking him to call at the Foreign Office, as the Great Man was anxious to know the result of his investigations.

Inspector Kenly looked at his watch. The afternoon was young. The Permanent Secretary could be kept waiting for an hour or two longer. The detective, leaving his bag behind him, strolled out into the sun-scorched streets. He had even forgotten that he had eaten no lunch, so eager was he on his quest. He walked briskly towards Westminster Mansions, and could have shouted with delight when he observed his old comrade standing at the open door. "Hello, looking for a breeze?" he remarked.

The porter chuckled. "If you've been locking any up lately, the sooner you let 'em loose again the better I shall be pleased," he remarked.

"It looks cooler inside than out here," said Kenly, with meaning.

The porter winked and led the way inside. Two lift attendants were seated languidly interesting themselves in the cricket intelligence of the latest evening papers.

Kenly glanced at them while he asked in a low tone, "Is there any chance of a private chat?"

His old comrade nodded, and after talking for a few moments on the burning topic of the weather, managed to send both the youths on an errand. Kenly grunted his relief. Directly he was alone with the porter he went straight to the point.

"I want to go over Mr. Lynton Hora's flat," he announced abruptly.

The porter gazed at him in silent astonishment.

"Yes, I mean exactly what I say," he continued, "and the sooner I can do so the better I shall be pleased. I suppose some of your people have a key."

The hall porter regained his power of speech. "It can't possibly be managed, Kenly," he spluttered. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for you in reason, but——"

Kenly shut him short. "It's got to be done," he remarked decisively. "I've come to you, because I know I can trust you to say nothing, and the fewer people who know what I am doing the better I shall be pleased."

"It can't be done," remarked the hall porter. "It would be as much as my place is worth."

"Pooh!" said the detective. "It is easy enough to make some excuse. You can say I'm the electric-light man, or that I have orders to clean out the cisterns."

"There ain't no cisterns that want cleaning," objected the hall porter. "Now if you had come and asked me two days ago there wouldn't have been any difficulty, but to-day——"

"Why is it impossible to-day?" demanded the detective.

"Well, Mr. Hora and Miss Myra have been away at Scarborough for the past fortnight, and I could have let you into their place; but I'm expecting them to return at any minute now."

"Then we mustn't lose any time talking about it," said Kenly briskly. "I suppose you have some means of communicating with the flat from here."

"There's the telephone," said the porter.

"Take me straight up," said Kenly, "and if Mr. Hora should arrive before I come down again, just give two rings at the telephone bell. I shall have plenty of time to let myself out before Mr. Hora returns."

He caught hold of the porter's arm and hurried him away in the direction of the lift. Protesting all the while that it would be impossible, and entreating Kenly to postpone his visit to a more convenient occasion, he yet allowed himself to be carried away by the detective's impetuosity. He protested while the lift went steadily upward, he protested even while he inserted a key in the lock, and Kenly left him outside the door still protesting.

Fortune seemed to be favouring the detective. From previous conversations he had gained a fairly accurate knowledge of the geography of the interior of Hora's residence, and he wasted no time in searching the residential portion of the flat. He went directly to the door which led to the room where Hora kept his pictures and his books. But here he experienced a rebuff. The door was locked, and the lock was a patent one. Kenly had with him a bunch of skeleton keys, but a very slight trial proved that the lock was unpickable. He began to cast around for some other

means of gaining access, but he saw none within the flat. He passed through all the rooms, glancing round each. He was impressed by the luxury of the furnishing, but there was nothing which would cause any one to suspect the occupant of anything but highly refined tastes. Kenly had just completed his hasty survey when the telephone bell rang twice.

"D—n," said the inspector. He opened the outer door and walked out into the passage outside. He knew that he must not be seen, and he hastily descended the flight of stairs to the floor below, and as he did so the lift passed him ascending upwards. He caught a glimpse of Hora's face.

Kenly waited until the lift descended. The hall porter himself was in charge. He stopped the lift. Kenly entered in silence.

"Find what you wanted?" asked the porter curiously.

"No time," grunted the detective. "I must have a look round another time. If I had only known yesterday what I learned to-day——" He groaned at the thought of what might be hidden beyond that locked door. Still he was not disheartened. He had noted the number of the lock and the name of the maker, and he knew that the next time he called the locked door would prove no barrier to his investigations. Still, days might pass before the opportunity he desired would recur, and it was annoying to feel that opportunity had been lost by so narrow a margin.

He bade his friend good-bye and went away at once to the Foreign Office.

The sky had become overcast and the atmosphere was hotter than ever. Visions of a long drink, with cool, translucent lumps of ice tinkling against the steamy glass, sorely tempted the detective, but he banished them, and, perspiring himself, he was at last ushered by a perspiring attendant into the presence of a perspiring Permanent Secretary, who had wheeled his chair on to a line between the open door and the open window, and sat there in his shirt-sleeves in the pathetic belief that a draught of cool air might be tempted to pass that way.

"What is it? What is it?" he snapped at the attendant who entered to announce Inspector Kenly. Then looking up he recognized his visitor standing at the open door.

"Oh, it's you, Kenly. Come in." The attendant withdrew. "And, yes, you had better shut the door." He sighed as if he had thereby ordered the door to be shut on his own salvation.

"Sit down, inspector, and tell me what you have found out," he added. He looked round for his cigar-case, and not finding it immediately made confusion of the piles of paper which covered his table.

"I think, Sir Everard, you will find your cigar-case in your coat pocket," observed the detective blandly.

The Permanent Secretary smiled as he thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his discarded coat.

"The heat always makes me irritable," he apologized. "No man ought to work when the thermometer reaches the eighties." He selected a cigar. "By the way," he remarked, "by what process of reasoning did you arrive at the deduction that my cigar-case was in my pocket?"

"I saw the corner of it sticking out," remarked the detective equably.

"H'm," said the Permanent Secretary, laughing, "the proper use of the eyes may on occasion be more valuable than any amount of deduction." He lit his cigar and stretched himself lazily in his chair. "Now fire away, Kenly. I can see that you have something to tell me about those stolen despatches."

Without unnecessary beating about the bush, Kenly began to tell the result of his investigations. The narration did not take long, for though he had already spent a month on the investigation, the facts he had discovered could be described in a very few words. But few as those facts were, they were sufficiently startling to make the Permanent Secretary forget the heat.

"By Jove!" he remarked when Kenly had finished. "And I would have pledged my life on Captain Marven's absolute honour. Yet from what you have told me he appears to be hand-in-glove with a gang of thieves, one of them living in his own house and likely at any moment to become engaged to his niece."

"Certainly appearances are very much against him," remarked Kenly cautiously, "but I never trust to appearances myself. I have seen too many cases where perfectly innocent persons have been on the most intimate terms with scoundrels to allow that one fact to weigh with me. If it was only a question of the burglary I should expect Captain Marven to be the next victim of the gang, and it is only the fact that it seems impossible for the contents of the despatches to have become known to the Horas without Marven's assistance which leads me to connect him with the rest of the crowd."

The Permanent Secretary puffed meditatively at his cigar. "Things look very black against Marven," he remarked, "very black indeed," he repeated after a lengthy pause; then he asked, "Who are these Horas?" Kenly shook his head.

"I should like to know their history myself," he answered. "All I have heard hitherto is that the elder man has occupied a first-class flat in Westminster for the past ten years at a rent of three hundred and fifty pounds a year, and passes as a very retired gentleman indeed. He only spends about six months of the year in London, and they say he has estates in Italy. That may or may not be the case, but anyhow he calls himself the Commendatore, which I'm told is an Italian title given him by the King of Italy for something or other he's done over there. The young one was at Oxbridge, and made quite a name amongst

his set, and lived at home till a few weeks ago, when he took some chambers in the Albany. Then there's a girl named Myra, who passes as the old man's daughter, though there's reason to think that she's only an adopted child."

"What are you proposing to do?" asked the Permanent Secretary after another pause.

Inspector Kenly coughed. "That depends——" he remarked, and paused. "That depends on circumstances. You see, Sir Everard, my hand may be forced before I shall have obtained all the evidence I want. That communication which has been made to Mr. Flurscheim may lead at any moment to the younger Hora's arrest, and then good-bye to the hope of obtaining any more evidence. What I was going to suggest was that you should allow me to continue to investigate your affair. It will leave me more free to look after things than if I have to turn in a report to head-quarters. I'm so afraid," he added in a burst of confidence, "that they might put some man on to the job who would bungle it. I've got an idea as to where the Greuze is hidden, but I know very well that at the first hint of anything going wrong it would disappear or be destroyed."

"Then you think that the same people who brought off the Flurscheim burglary are responsible for the despatch leakage?" asked the Permanent Secretary.

"Certain of it," declared Inspector Kenly.

"But if you continue to work on my business,

isn't what you fear likely to come to pass? Will not another man be put on to the picture robbery? Flurscheim will hardly keep silence."

"I'll see after that," answered Kenly. "From what I know of Mr. Flurscheim, he won't let the grass grow under his feet. He is probably on the way to town now."

"Then what becomes of your plans?" asked the Permanent Secretary. He could see that the detective had not revealed all that was in his mind.

"Mr. Flurscheim wants to get his Greuze back undamaged," said the detective slowly, "and he also wants to punish the man who stole it. I shall see him directly he arrives in town, and I think I can make it clear to him that he had better say nothing until I consider the time ripe for action."

"There's only one thing more," remarked the Permanent Secretary. "Suppose I think it necessary to ask Captain Marven for an explanation?"

The detective jumped to his feet with a look of horror on his face. "Good heavens, Sir Everard!" he exclaimed. "You would spoil everything. You won't do it."

The Permanent Secretary laughed.

"You may make your mind easy, Kenly," he observed. "I'm too much of a sportsman for that, I hope."

CHAPTER XX

GUY'S LAST THEFT

WHILE Inspector Kenly was hastening to London, events at Whitsea were shaping themselves to the bewilderment of a number of the inhabitants of that pleasant little yachting resort. There was electricity in the air, afflicting every one with a vague disquietude. Meriel, thinking over Guy's wild outburst after his passionate declaration of love, felt a strange dread of what the day should bring forth. Guy, fearing the result of the confession he had promised to make, could see no sun behind the gathering clouds. Mrs. Marven, noticing a new-born constraint between the two young people, began to think that she had misread the signs which had seemed confidently to predict a love match. Captain Marven, less dubious on this point, only felt vaguely uneasy. He therefore decided that the electricity was not produced by mental disturbance, but was purely atmospheric.

"There is thunder in the air," he declared, and counselled the members of his household not to get far away from home.

But on the physical horizon there was no cloud.

Guy, wishing to be alone once more with Meriel, proposed that they should bring the *Witch* home, and Meriel, fearless of the sun and longing for an end to her suspense, acceded to the suggestion.

After an early lunch they started. The heat was greater than ever, but Guy was heedless of it. He pulled at the oars as if physical exertion were a panacea for a troubled mind. Meriel, watching him from the stern as the dinghy cut through the water, rejoiced in his strength. At least her lover was a man.

She wondered greatly what was on his mind. She was no petticoated ignoramus of the world. She knew that men were sometimes caught in feminine entanglements, and were sometimes even ashamed of their folly. It might be that Guy had been so caught, and felt in honour bound to acquaint her with his difficulty. She did not want to hear. It was quite sufficient that he should desire that she should know the worst of him. When he spoke she would stop him. She was quite sure, even as she had said on the previous evening, that nothing that had happened in the past could make any difference.

The *Witch* rode to her anchor with her bows pointing to the shore, for the tide was still ebbing when they reached her side.

Meriel felt Guy's hand tremble as it clasped hers to assist her aboard. She knew that the time had come when Guy would speak. She could have cried aloud to him to remain for ever silent, for a fear came upon

her that it was no youthful indiscretion which her companion proposed to reveal, but something vital to their joint happiness, something searing to their love. She put the thought aside. Her love was her life—more, for it would endure after life itself had departed.

"Are you listening, Meriel?" asked Guy a little later.

He had set the mainsail, and in the shadow it cast on deck he had arranged cushions for her. She looked up at him in mute answer.

"Meriel, don't look at me. Your eyes will make a coward of me," he said. "Look out on the horizon. Do you see the white sail yonder? That boat is coming on the first of the tide; by the time she reaches us you will have no wish to look upon me again."

She denied the statement vehemently.

"I know what I have to tell you," he answered steadily. "But first I should like you to know something of the beliefs in which I was brought up."

He told her first of Lynton Hora's enmity with the world, told her of his philosophy, of his conception of mankind as a fortuitous aggregation of warring atoms, each hypocritically desirous of concealing his real intent from his neighbours.

"This I believed till I met you, Meriel," he said.

"But if that is all——" Her voice died away. Looking at him, she saw his face had hardened.

"It is not all." He told her of his early training, of the practical exposition of Hora's philosophy.

Meriel no longer looked at her companion's face. She began to feel horror growing upon her. She gazed now at the white sail. It was perceptibly nearer.

He carried the story of his life on to the point where he left the University, told her how, merely in obedience to his father's advice, he had not during those days practised the principles in which he had believed. Hope began to grow again in her heart. She murmured "Go on" eagerly.

He told her of his earnest desire to win the approbation of his father, depicted for her the glamour which the adventurous aspect of his profession presented. Abruptly he told her of his first enterprise.

Meriel's heart almost ceased to beat. The white sails of the oncoming boat fascinated her. They were very near now.

"That is not all, yet," he said. "There is one other thing you must know." Faltering not at all, excusing himself in no way, he told her the history of the stolen despatches.

He had not looked at her at all during the narration, but now he ventured one glance. Her face was unnaturally pale.

"You know now why I could not ask you to marry me," he said. "I cannot ask you to marry a thief. Yet I want you to believe that thief though I am,

I could not steal your love. You must believe that of me. It is true." She heard him, but she made no answer. The boat she had been watching had crept up until it was level. It passed. She shivered in spite of the heat.

Guy had moved quietly away. She saw that the *Witch* had swung on the tide. She watched him weigh the anchor and get the boat on the way with a curious fear in her heart—a fear for herself. In looks, in bearing, in his manner he was every inch a man, a man that she loved.

But he was a thief—the thief who had treacherously robbed the man who had been a father to her, a thief for whom the police were searching, a thief who might any day stand in the dock as a felon.

"Guy is a thief! a thief! a thief!" She had to repeat the words to herself again and again lest she should forget. Yes, he had been quite right, she could never marry a thief. She supposed that she ought to be thankful to him for having told her before she had married him. She would have married him if he had not told her. But he was wrong in saying that he could not steal her love. He had stolen it. If she had known from the first, she would never have given her heart to him. But he had come and taken it away, and now that he had given it back to her——

Guy had come to the tiller. She roused herself and looked into his face.

"It is not true that you did not steal my love," she

said. "You took my heart from me and you have broken it, and now you bring me back the pieces and say you did not steal it." She spoke dispassionately, as one who would argue the point.

Guy wondered at the tone until he saw the dazed look in the girl's eyes.

"Meriel," he cried, "for God's sake don't look at me like that! Say something, anything, if only it were to curse me! I had to tell you, even though I knew that the telling would end my life's happiness."

"I had no reason to think that you were anything but an honourable man. I have never mixed with any but honourable men, and so I suppose I was deceived," she answered wearily. "I don't suppose I ought to blame you."

She turned away and, going forward, leaned upon the staffrack, where she was hidden from his sight by the intervening sail. Tears had come to her relief at last.

The boat drifted on with the tide. The sky was becoming overcast, and away in the north a heavy bunch of clouds was gathering. A sudden breeze ruffled the surface of the water and died away as swiftly as it arose. A puff filled the sails. It came from the south, another puff followed it from another quarter, heading the *Witch* so that the sails flapped wildly. Guy had barely brought her up to the wind before it veered again to the south. The *Witch* leaned over under the pressure, and gathering way set the

foam swirling away from her bows. As the squall strengthened the spars began to talk, and Guy cast an anxious look aloft. The squall died away, and once more the boat drifted. But the ten minutes' breeze had brought them near home. They were amongst the other boats moored in the river opposite the quay.

Meriel had not moved from her place forward. Her tears had ceased to flow. In a few more minutes she would have said good-bye to Guy and to love. She looked up. The *Witch* was drifting past Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim's yacht, and the connoisseur was on the deck. Meriel recognized him at the same moment that she was recognized. "Good afternoon, Miss Challis. Look out for the storm, Mr. Hora," cried Flurscheim.

Was there a spice of mockery in his voice, or was it her fancy? Meriel could not be certain. There had been a smile on Flurscheim's face. Supposing he suspected that Guy was the man who had robbed him of his treasure? Guy would be arrested. She knew in that moment that all that he had told her had made no difference to her affection. She knew that she loved him, thief as he was—that she would do anything, make any sacrifice, to rescue him from the result of his misdeeds. She left her post and went aft to Guy's side. A distant flash of lightning illuminated Flurscheim's face. He was still smiling as he gazed in their direction. She wondered whether Guy had observed the Jew's expression. If so, he had paid no heed to it. His whole attention was given to the boat, though now

and again he cast an anxious glance at the sky. "Here comes the breeze again," he muttered. He gave a sigh of relief as the sails filled. "Five minutes of it and we shall escape the storm," he said. The *Witch* heeled over till her rail was awash and the foam creamed away in their wake.

Meriel looked back at Flurscheim. He waved his hand, and even as he waved it he overbalanced and fell forward into the water. She gave utterance to a sharp cry of alarm.

"What is it?" shouted Guy, for the rushing of the wind made ordinary speech impossible to be heard.

"Flurscheim is overboard!" she gasped.

Without a moment's hesitation Guy put the tiller down, and as the *Witch* came up into the wind he glanced in the direction to which Meriel pointed. A dark object was being borne swiftly along on the tide. Guy kept the tiller down until the boat was before the wind, and giving the mainsail more sheet the *Witch* scudded back in the direction he had come. But the dark object had disappeared.

"Can you manage the tiller?" shouted Guy.

Meriel nodded.

"Bring her up into the wind the moment I tell you," he said. He cast loose the painter of the dinghy towing aft, and stood with it in his hand watching patiently. The dark object reappeared not a dozen yards away. He had already kicked off his boots. He dropped the painter.

"Now!" he shouted to Meriel, and took a header straight into the tossing water.

Guy had not trusted to Meriel in vain. When he rose to the surface and shook the water out of his eyes he saw that the yacht was lying-to, not half a cable's length away. He had barely time to appreciate the fact when the object he had dived for floated towards him. He caught a glimpse of a despairing face, and the next moment he had grasped Flurscheim by the collar and was striking out strongly in the direction of the dinghy, drifting, like themselves, with the tide, only a few yards away. Flurscheim had struggled when Guy had first gripped him, but his struggles had soon ceased. Guy got him to the side of the boat but could not hoist him aboard. He threw one arm over the stern and hung on, supporting Flurscheim with the other hand. He had not to wait very long. The accident had been observed from the deck of the connoisseur's yacht, and two of her crew, tumbling hastily into their own dinghy, came swiftly to the rescue. Flurscheim was hauled aboard; Guy followed, and as he bent over the Jew his eyes opened and a glance of recognition came into them.

"Not much the worse for your ducking, eh, Mr. Flurscheim?" asked Guy. The connoisseur struggled into a sitting position. He held out his hand mutely. Guy took it for a minute in his, then turned to the men who had come to their assistance.

He pointed to the drifting dinghy. "If you'll get

hold of that I'll pull myself aboard," he said quietly; "Mr. Flurscheim will be all right." He was obeyed, and a minute later he stepped aboard the *Witch* and, once more taking the tiller, brought her up to the wind and steered for home. Meriel said nothing—what could she say? To her Guy's action was heroic. His coolness, the absolute confidence with which he had set about the work of rescue, the ease with which he had performed the task he had set himself, revealed qualities which filled her with admiration. Yet the man who possessed these qualities was a thief. No, there was nothing she could say.

The *Witch* flew homewards and the Hall came into view.

"Will you take the tiller again, Miss Challis?" he asked as the boat neared the buoy.

She took it from him mechanically. He went forward, hauled in the foresail, and, as the boat came about, dropped the peak. The *Witch* drove leisurely on to her moorings, and in a couple of minutes she was fast. There was no time to waste. Meriel hastened to his assistance. They worked side by side in stowing away the canvas. The storm held off, though the clouds had nearly covered the sky by the time everything had been made snug aboard. "Come," said Guy, as he drew the dinghy alongside. Meriel stepped into the boat, and a dozen strokes took them to the bank.

"We shall just manage to get home before the storm

breaks," he continued, as he handed her ashore, and, following, made the painter fast to the guide-rope.

He was right in his estimate, though they had to hasten their footsteps to gain shelter, for almost as soon as they had reached the top of the wall the lightning blazed out and the thunder crashed at the same moment. Meriel had been on the verge of hysteria. The atmospheric tumult had come at a time when her nerves were shattered; she wanted to shriek, her muscles seemed to fail her.

"A near thing," said Guy. The equability of his voice gave Meriel renewed confidence. She looked up at his face and wondered that it was flushed with delight. She stumbled—Guy's hand steadied her. He caught her up in his arms and carried her onwards. She felt a delicious sense of safety, and immediately the thought followed—he is a thief. They came to the lawn gate and he set her on her feet.

She forgot the storm. She laid her hand on his arm. "Tell me it is untrue," she cried.

He took both her hands in his. "I love you, Meriel," he said simply. "I wish I could say, 'Yes, it is untrue,' but I cannot." He took her arm and hurried her across the lawn until they stood beneath the porch. There with one piteous glance she left him without another word.

His eyes followed her along the passage, then he turned and went out into the storm. He was the only living thing abroad, and he rejoiced in the soli-

tude. He had no fear of the revolting elements. Their mood suited his. He would have welcomed the flash which should sear his body, even as the lightning of his emotions had seared his soul. He had told himself that his story would kill the love that he had seen springing up in Meriel's heart, but all the while he had hoped that it would survive the stroke he would deal at the root. How much he had hoped he had not realized until he saw the anguish on her face, until he saw that she had shrunk from him. He could have borne anger, taunts even, but silence—the silence of contempt, for so he translated Meriel's attitude—that filled him with bitterness. There was no hope for him. He was overwhelmed with youth's Byronic despair. Heedless of his path he went onward. The thunder crashed, later the rain fell, but he pressed onwards blindly.

The awakening came when the storm, passing away, gave place to a golden sunset. Guy found himself far away from sight of human habitation, with the sea on one hand, on the other the saltings stretching away to the horizon. The passing of the storm brought no renewal of hope to him. He was wearied, mentally and physically. He knew the direction in which Whitsea lay, and he turned his face towards it.

It was dark by the time he arrived at the Hall, and he heard the dinner-gong ring as he entered the door. He did not obey his first impulse to shirk facing the inmates of the house. He threw off his

rain-sodden clothes and put on conventional dinner attire so swiftly that he was ready before the second gong sounded.

"Meriel will not be down," said Mrs. Marven as he entered the drawing-room. "The storm has given her a headache. I am so sorry, as it is your last evening."

Guy could only murmur something unintelligible, while he told himself bitterly that the girl would not even look upon him.

CHAPTER XXI

EXPECTATION

LYNTON HORA felt more uneasiness than he would have acknowledged at Guy's failure to communicate with him. Nor did the daily reports with which Cornelius Jessel supplied him, do anything to allay his disquietude. These would have furnished entertainment to the Commendatore had they related to anybody but Guy. Indeed, the shadow-man's matter-of-fact chronicle of the day-by-day doings of a young man in love would have been food for mirth to the mildest cynic.

"Took G.'s shaving water at 7. D—d me because he scraped himself shaving. Said I hadn't stropped the razors properly. As soon as he was up he went into the garden and helped Miss Challis syringe the rose trees. They went into breakfast together. After breakfast he sent me down to the village to see if some music he had ordered for Miss Challis had arrived. When I got back, found he had gone out on the boat with Miss Challis for a sail. Did not come back until dinner-time. Saw them come home. They had been alone together all day. Heard the Captain say to

Mrs. M., 'We shall not have to wait very long now for an announcement.' She answered, 'They hardly seem to remember that there's anybody else in the world. . . .'

But Lynton Hora was not amused by the record as he would have been had Guy taken him into confidence respecting what was obviously an affair of the heart. He knew Guy well enough to be aware that he was always in deadly earnest in any pursuit in which he engaged, and he dreaded the influence which a pure, straightforward woman might have upon him. If Meriel Challis had been the sort of woman who amused herself by luring a man on to a declaration, he would have been delighted at Guy's infatuation; the lesson would have been good for him, but he could not lull his forebodings by any such narcotic.

He saw Guy drifting away from him, throwing overboard the whole cargo of criminal philosophy, which had been so carefully provided for him, at the bidding of a mere girl. He had no fear for himself. Guy might recant the faith in which he had been brought up, but Lynton Hora did not for a moment imagine that the recantation would be accompanied by any treachery towards himself. Loyalty was a distinguishing feature of Guy's nature. He would never reveal anything which would injure the man whom he looked upon as father. The Commendatore felt perfectly safe on that point so long as Guy should not learn nor ever suspect that he, Lynton Hora, was not

his father——The Commendatore did not pursue the thought, though he foresaw the possibility, and had provided what he thought would be a complete defence against any trouble to himself through the awakening of such a suspicion. Lynton Hora left as little as possible to chance, and ordinary caution had led him to anticipate the possibility of the discovery of Guy's real parentage, even though the possibility was of the remotest.

But it was not only the question of danger to himself which troubled him, it was the thought that Guy would no longer be his son. All those years he had spent in moulding the boy's mind had not been without effect on Lynton Hora. Unknowingly he had given away what he did not know that he possessed. It was in reality a real human affection for his foster-child which made him so perturbed. Cold as he had always been in his outward demeanour, he had learned, when Guy had departed to chambers of his own, that without him life had somehow suddenly ceased to interest him. The fanatical priest, rearing the victim for sacrifice at the altar of an unappeasable deity, suddenly realized that he had learned to love the proposed victim. Yet rather than he should fall under the influence of the man whom he looked upon as his bitterest enemy, he would have sacrificed the victim, even if he should eternally regret the oblation.

He did not, it is true, anticipate such necessity. He allowed for Guy's youth. Youth was ever impression-

able and romantic, changing in its fancy, and ever amenable to the mutable feminine. Once let him be removed from the presence of Meriel Challis, and Hora thought that Guy might be weaned from his obvious infatuation. Indeed, there was a probability that his romantic imaginings might be turned to account. The young man, floundering out of his depths in the quicksands of romantic imaginings, might be easily captured by the wiles of a really clever woman.

Hora set himself earnestly to work to tutor Myra in the part he destined her to play in the recalling of Guy. He did so entirely by suggestion. He had taken her away from London, telling her that she needed sea air to restore the roses of her complexion if she wished to be beautiful in Guy's eyes when he returned to town. Then, when away, he continued day by day, hour by hour, to sting her emotions. He dwelt continually upon her beauty, chided her for her prudishness in not setting it forth to its fullest advantage, insisting that man is always malleable as wax when beauty holds out alluring arms and proffers devotion. Myra listened eagerly. Perhaps Hora was right. Perhaps she had held herself too cheaply, had been too reserved. He talked to her much also of Guy, declaring that he was as other men. If Myra realized any intention in his words she gave no sign of doing so. Then one day, soon after leaving town, Hora gave a hint that perhaps already some rival was claiming

Guy's kisses. At that suggestion Myra's eyes flashed dangerously. Hora noted the glance.

"There's only one perfect revenge upon a rival," Hora remarked, "and that is to steal away the rival's lover."

"You don't mean to tell me that Guy——" said Myra, heedless of the suggestion. She could not utter the words which would have voiced her fear that Guy had already given his love to another.

"I tell you that there is a chit of a girl in the country who, if she knew as much as you do, would have taken Guy from us long ago. Fortunately she is a fool, or Guy would be lost. As it is, Myra, your chance has not yet passed."

She hoped not, and, though she doubted, Hora's confidence reassured her.

That same afternoon as they passed a stationer's shop, with a window full of photographs of popular beauties, Hora paused, and directed her attention to a portrait within.

"If you really wish to robe yourself for conquest you could not find a more suitable model," he remarked of one of them.

Myra understood the allusion and blushed. They passed on without another word. Later on Myra returned to the shop alone and obtained the photograph. The same evening she asked Hora for a cheque. He gave her the sum she asked unquestioningly.

Next day she sent the photograph and the cheque,

accompanied by a long letter of instructions, to Madame Gabrielle, her London dressmaker. Three days later Madame Gabrielle arrived in Scarborough, and Myra gave the whole morning to the tedious business of fitting. Hora asked no questions.

The day came for their return to town. Myra was feverishly anxious to be off, fearful lest Guy should be back before them, fearful lest he should not come back at all. He had not written once, either to her or to Hora, during the whole fortnight. Hora did his best to mitigate her obvious anxiety.

"No doubt we shall find a letter waiting for us on our return," he said.

His surmise proved correct. The letter which Jessel had posted for Guy that same morning at Whitsea was lying on the table in the entrance-hall. Myra seized it eagerly. Her colour came and went as Hora opened it deliberately.

"What does he say? When is he coming?" she cried.

For answer Hora read the letter aloud.

"'I am returning to town to-morrow, after spending a fortnight with Captain Marven, and I have something important to tell you. I am afraid you won't like what I have to say; but I cannot help myself, even if it should lead to a parting of our ways. Yes, I fear it has come to that. I will come in to-morrow, after dinner, if you will be at home."

That was all. Hora's voice became harsh as he read,

and as he finished he crumpled the letter in his hand and threw it aside.

"A parting of the ways. It has come to that, has it?" he muttered. His brow grew dark and his eyes flashed dangerously. "A parting of the ways, and all for the sake of a milk-and-water country girl. What do you say to that, Myra?"

He turned suddenly upon his companion. He was almost alarmed at what he saw. Her face was death-like in its pallor, and in her pale face her dark eyes flashed with unnatural brightness. She reeled slightly and grasped with both hands at a table to steady herself. He did not press the question. He led her to a chair, turned swiftly to a tantalus and, pouring brandy into a glass, held it to her lips.

"You fool!" he said, and his tone was kindly though his words were rough. "You fool, to set such store by any piece of mere frail humanity! Drink this."

Myra obeyed the command. Gradually the colour came back to her cheeks. She sat up, but her mouth drooped at the corners, there was despair in her eyes.

"I could not help but give him my love," she said piteously, "and he will have none of it."

Hora turned aside and paced the room irresolutely. He seated himself at a writing-table, scribbled rapidly, and when he had finished brought the note over to Myra. She read it listlessly.

"Dear Guy," Hora had written, "you are a most amazing person, and I haven't the slightest idea as to the meaning of your melodramatic phrases. You know you may always please yourself as to anything you choose to do. If you do not like your profession, by all means change it for any of the legalized forms of plunder; but even if that is in your thoughts you need not worry over it. A man has an inalienable right to please himself, and I shall not think the less of you for making your own decision, even if that decision is one which destroys all my hopes of a successor. You will find I can discuss the matter quite philosophically; but come before dinner to-morrow night, and we will have a quiet chat over a cigar afterwards. If our ways are to lie apart, you need not quite desert us. Perhaps you might even convince me, not perhaps that my calling is not as honourable as any other parasitic method of living, but that I might do well at my age to retire from the active practice of my profession. Dinner at 8.30. Yours, LYNTON HORA."

Myra read the letter, but the perusal brought no hope to her. Hora folded it, placed it in an envelope, sealed and stamped it deliberately. He rang the bell and ordered the letter to be posted. Myra still sat silent. Then Hora said to her quietly—

"You will have to entertain Guy alone to-morrow, Myra. I shall be called away on important business."

"I cannot; indeed, I cannot!" she cried.

He continued deaf to her protest. "It is your only

chance, Myra. To-morrow night you must win him or lose him for ever. You must not fail, or——"

He turned and left the room, leaving the threat unspoken.

She sat there long after he departed.

Her only chance! In one or two brief hours she must bind Guy to her indissolubly. Hora had taught her, without ever once uttering a word which might offend, how she could win him if she so chose. He had insisted upon Guy's chivalrous nature. He had insisted, too, that the most puritanical of men could be fascinated by the appeal of beauty. Thoughts came to her which set her cheeks burning. But she did not banish those thoughts. She remained motionless, until a maid appeared to ask if she could see Madame Gabrielle.

"Yes, at once," she answered; "bring her to my room."

Her listlessness had entirely departed as she rose and hurried after the maid. A minute later the dressmaker was ushered into her presence. The woman was a voluble specimen of her type, and as she unpacked the box she descanted freely on the beauties of the "creation" she had brought with her. She became more voluble than ever when Myra was robed in the new frock.

"Ah! but it is ravishing. Mademoiselle's figure is magnificent, and the tint suits mademoiselle's complexion and colouring to perfection. Oh! but it is a

pity mademoiselle is in London. Only in Paris could such a work of art be appreciated. Ah, mademoiselle has the right idea of dress. It is a pleasure to make for her."

With deft fingers she fluttered round, settling a tuck here, smoothing a fold there. "Let mademoiselle observe for herself," said the woman.

Myra surveyed herself in the full-length mirror. Madame Gabrielle was right. Her skin was dazzlingly fair against the dull rose tint of the fabric. Yes, she was beautiful. The mirror did not lie. The eyes that looked into her own from the silver depths had the light of triumph in them. Surely if Guy once realised that he was everything to her——

Myra turned to the *modiste*. "You have carried out my idea exactly. I am very pleased," she said.

Madame Gabrielle beamed with gratification. She began again to express her pleasure in gowning such a perfect figure. Myra cut her short; she wanted to be alone. When the woman had departed she approached the mirror again and looked steadily at the reflection. Taking up a hand-glass she moved backwards and forwards, up and down, posturing in a score of different ways. Then suddenly she flung herself down upon her knees by the side of a chair and threw her arms in the air with a cry of despair. Something gave way in the new frock, but she paid no heed.

"Oh, Guy, Guy!" she wailed. But the cry was

hardly uttered before it was checked. She bit her lip and looked again at the mirror to gather courage.

She blushed. A hook had broken and the bodice had slipped. Suppose that Guy had answered her call! Her heart beat almost as tumultuously as if he had been present. She made a pin do service for the broken hook, and, smiling, again went in search of Hora.

She found him in his study with a volume of the "Arabian Nights" open before him, but with his eyes gazing into vacancy. He did not glance at her as she entered. She moved gracefully across the room until she stood before him, then she asked simply—

"Shall I do, Commendatore?"

Her voice was low, alluring, with a spice of mockery in it. Hora looked up impatiently and he caught his breath. His impatience vanished. A smile passed over his face. Then he looked critically at his *vis-a-vis*, so critically that Myra flushed rosily and half turned away.

"Do?" said Hora. "If I had lived in the fifteenth century I should have declared that you had been taking counsel with the devil."

"Perhaps I have," she replied, but the mockery was still in her voice.

"I believe you could bewitch even me if you chose," he said as he looked again. "You would serve for a picture of temptation incarnate."

She laughed happily and her eyes shone softly.

"It is for Guy," she answered; "all for Guy."

Lynton Hora recovered his wonted mood.

"Lucky young devil!" he remarked cynically. His mood changed again. "Look here, Myra," he cried, "you and Guy must be married as soon as it can be managed. No, you need not interrupt me. You can keep him here until I return and a special licence can be obtained. When he leaves this flat it must be only with his bride. I will make all arrangements, and——" he paused before continuing, "afterwards you shall have your wish. Guy shall engage in no more dangerous enterprises. We will sign an armistice with the world."

Myra gave a cry of delight. She seized Hora's hand, pressing it between her own two palms. "You are so good to me, Commendatore," she said earnestly. "So good to me, and yet I fear lest it should be too late. I only want Guy to love me—if—if he doesn't ——" Tears stood in her eyes, and a sob choked her utterance.

"Guy cannot but love you," answered Hora, and he truly believed what he said. "No man in his senses could reject such devotion as yours when once he is aware of its depths."

"But—I—I cannot tell him," she said helplessly, dropping his hand.

Hora looked at her curiously.

"No?" he said. "There will be plenty of time for that afterwards. First you have to win him."

He caught one of her hands in his own, and something of his own virile power seemed to be transmitted to her. "You are irresistible in some moods, Myra; and if I were forty years younger and could be foolish again I would take care that Guy never came near you. If you wish, you may be as certain of winning him as that to-morrow will dawn." His tone denoted absolute conviction.

Myra drew away her hand.

"Good-night, Commendatore," she said. She gave him her cheek, and he brushed it lightly with his lips before she turned away and left him without another word.

"Good heavens!" he muttered to himself when the door closed behind her, "if I were forty years younger——" He smiled cynically and added, "I don't think we have come to the parting of the ways just yet, Guy."

CHAPTER XXII

TEMPTATION

THE last evening Guy had spent at Whitsea had seemed interminable. Both his host and hostess had observed his depression, but tactfully took no notice. Then when Guy was alone with Captain Marven he had braced himself to give what explanation he could. He spoke of his love for Meriel: Captain Marven was sympathetic. He spoke of its hopelessness: Captain Marven wondered. Haltingly he revealed that he had considered it to be his duty to disclose facts concerning himself which had placed an insuperable barrier between them. The initial embarrassment in finding speech once surmounted, he had no difficulty in making clear to his host that it would be best that he should depart by the earliest possible train. Captain Marven was greatly disturbed. Guy's veiled allusions were without meaning to him. He even feared that the young man's brain was disordered, though his demeanour was calm enough to reassure him. He begged Guy to confide in him fully. Guy longed to do so, but refrained. The thought of his father restrained him.

Marven was compelled to agree that it were best for him to depart without further speech with Meriel.

So Guy left Whitsea without even seeing Meriel again. He had hungered for another glance from her eyes, another touch of her fingers, but neither had been vouchsafed to him.

He left early in the morning, and only Captain Marven bade him adieu. The Captain's hearty handshake was comforting, even though Guy felt, as the warm grasp closed on his, that it was given under false pretences. He loathed himself more than ever at that moment, and there crept into his mind the determination to make amends.

But how? Guy could think of no way, for there was his father to be considered. He would have liked to say to Captain Marven, "You must not take my hand. I have obtained your friendship under false pretences. I have robbed you of your trust. Now I ask you to name the punishment." That would be manly, but it would be treachery to Hora.

Guy groaned in his spirit. One thing he was determined upon. In the future the son should not tread in the steps of his father. Hora's arguments might convince his understanding, but they would not bear the test of practical application. The world was not the agglomeration of warring atoms he had been taught to believe. Honesty was not a pious hypocrisy with which men deluded themselves. A courage for the forbidden was not the greatest of all

virtues. Meriel had shattered all these old beliefs. He knew that they were gone for ever, that in future Lynton Hora's predatory philosophy would cease to appeal to him. But he had nothing to take the place of these shattered principles. Nothing but the memory of a girl who, loving him, thrust him away in horror that he should be a thief. He loathed himself because he should be an object of loathing to her. He could not bear the idea that his needs should be supplied by means which awakened her to such disgust. At least it was within his power to alter that. He could go out into the world and make his own way honestly. If he could not win Meriel, at least he could prove himself worthy of her. But that would necessitate his cutting himself adrift from Hora entirely. Well, he would pay that price gladly. He would waste no time before doing so. Yet though he arrived early in town, he did not go at once to Westminster Mansions.

He found Hora's letter awaiting him at his own abode, and was surprised, even touched, by its contents. Hora seemed to have guessed at the upheaval his opinions had undergone and to be prepared to meet him half-way. Guy was relieved at the thought. He had dreaded his father's gibes more than aught else, and he wondered what could have happened to have so suddenly made the Commendatore malleable to a mere suggestion—he who had always been so fiercely insistent upon his right to dominate the lives

virtues. Meriel had shattered all those [illegible]. He knew that they were gone for ever like a [illegible] Lynton Hora's predatory [illegible] would cease to appeal to him. But he was [illegible] of these shattered principles. Existing [illegible] memory of a girl who, loving him, [illegible] horror that he should be a thief. He [illegible] because he should be an object of [illegible] could not bear the idea that he was [illegible] plied by means which [illegible] At least it was within his power [illegible] could go out into the world [illegible] honestly. If he could [illegible] could prove himself worthy of her [illegible] necessitate his cutting himself [illegible] entirely. Well, he would [illegible] He would waste no time [illegible] he arrived early in town [illegible] Westminster Mansions.

He found Hora's letter awaiting [illegible] abode, and was surprised and [illegible] tents. Hora seemed to have [illegible] his opinions had undergone [illegible] meet him half-way. [illegible] He had dreaded his father's [illegible] else, and he wondered what [illegible] have so suddenly made [illegible] to a mere suggestion—he [illegible] fiercely insistent upon his [illegible]

of his children. Guy puzzled for hours for an answer. He did not distrust Hora. The Commendatore had not been accustomed to deceive him.

A prey to a whole host of conflicting thoughts, Guy passed the day, and the hour arrived when he was due at Westminster Mansions. He was averse to accepting Hora's hospitality, to sit at the table supplied by means he had learnt to detest. In a few hours his thoughts had travelled a tremendous distance. He was not of the type which palters with convictions. Just as whole-heartedly as he had adopted Hora's teachings he was prepared to tread the path of rectitude. But he felt that he would not be at peace with himself until he had divested himself of every vestige of the products of his evil deeds. Yet though the acceptance of Hora's invitation savoured of compromise, he realized that it would be ungracious to refuse. Hora had been good to him, even if misguided. There was no need that they should part in anger.

It was with the sense of a prisoner under sentence of death that he dressed. Cornelius might have been a warder assisting him on the execution morn. It was for the last time. To-morrow he would be quite alone. He set his teeth grimly and fought against the feeling of depression as he drove to Westminster Mansions. His mind was abnormally active. He observed details that would have escaped his attention under ordinary circumstances. He saw

that the hall porter looked at him curiously, and wondered why. The deferential welcome of the lift man irritated him.

Arrived at the flat, he felt in his pocket for the key of the outer door which Lynton Hora had insisted upon his retaining, and he was annoyed to find that he had left it at his chambers. He had intended to leave it behind him. He rang, and the man who opened the door seemed surprised.

"Is my father in?" he asked, as he handed the man his hat.

"No, sir," the man answered.

Guy paused irresolutely. He himself was late. "Will he be back for dinner?" he asked. Before the man could reply the door of the drawing-room opened.

"Is that you, Guy? How is it that you troubled to ring? Have you lost your key?"

Myra came with outstretched hands to greet him. "Welch, take Mr. Guy's coat, and we will have dinner served at once," she said to the man, and turning to Guy she continued rapidly—

"The Commendatore was called away on business and told me not to wait dinner. He expects to be back during the evening." Guy submitted and followed her into the drawing-room.

"You are a stranger, Guy," she said. "I think it is downright mean of you to desert us."

Guy meeting her glance told himself that he had

been egregiously mistaken in thinking that Myra had never thought of him save as a brother.

"You don't seem to have suffered from my absence," he said lightly.

"Don't you think I have grown thin?" she answered. There was mockery in her tone.

Guy was glad to find her in so cheerful a mood. He smiled back at her and for the first time looked at her with seeing eyes. She stood before him in the perfection of her young womanhood, glowing with health and youth and beauty. Truly she was beautiful. He wondered that he had not realized how beautiful before. He did not know how carefully she had studied the part she intended to play. He had no idea that the gown which became her so wonderfully had been expressly designed for his allurement.

"I have never seen you looking so well," he answered.

She saw the admiration in his glance, but gave no sign of doing so, though her heart began to throb with hope.

"I'm afraid I cannot return the compliment," she answered. "You look as if you haven't been to bed for a week. Now come along in to dinner, and tell me what you have been doing with yourself."

She took his arm, and they entered the dining-room together. "For the last time, perhaps," he murmured to himself regretfully. Myra was a good

sort, he mused. Despite her waves of anger, she had always been thoughtful of his welfare. Yet she was part of Hora's life. He forgot her momentarily in his surroundings. Everything was so homelike. Meriel Challis was an occupant of dreamland, surely, and he had never really experienced all the mental disturbances which had troubled him. He awoke to reality with the popping of a cork.

"No wine," he said.

Myra pouted rosy lips at him. "I insist," she replied imperiously. "In default of a fatted calf, which one cannot possibly get served in a flat, I insist upon champagne."

She lifted her glass to her lips. "May all our hopes come true," she said, and drank.

There was something infectious in her gaiety. Guy raised his glass in response. "Amen," he said fervently. The wine brought colour to his cheeks and brightness to his eyes. He suddenly remembered that he was hungry, that he had eaten nothing since breakfast, and that then a bare morsel of toast had been almost more than he could swallow. Myra watched him with a smile ever on her lips and chattered vivaciously of Scarborough. She did not ask him concerning his doings. She desired to lull his memories to rest, and Guy was willing to let them slumber. He did not perceive that danger threatened his new-made resolutions.

Under the spell of Myra's vivacity he became his

natural self. He was even surprised when he found himself laughing naturally. The dinner was not too long, and every dish, Guy noted, was one for which at some time or another he had expressed a preference. He was thirsty, and his glass was always full.

The dinner came to an end. "We will have coffee in the drawing-room," she said, rising, "then I can smoke, too."

He rose and accompanied her. Her hope was growing strong now. She was satisfied with her work so far. She had never before held Guy's interest for so long a time.

"Your old chair," she said to him as they entered together.

A fire was blazing merrily on the hearth, for the heat wave which had swept the City had been driven away by the storm, and the night was cold.

"Fires in August," he said as he entered.

She looked at him strangely.

"There's something comforting to me in the fire," she answered. "Especially now I'm so much alone. I often have one lighted, whatever the thermometer says, and sit for hours looking into it."

She knelt down on the snowy fur of the rug and stretched her arms to the blaze.

Guy was stricken again with a sense of her beauty. Her eyes were half closed. She might have been a priestess offering an oblation to the spurting flames

which threw rosy shadows on her face and arms and shoulders.

"I love the fire," she said dreamily. "I think I am almost a fire worshipper. When the flames spring up my heart rejoices, so that I can sing aloud; and when they die down into a dull red glow I can dream and dream. But when the fire is out—Guy, don't you just hate ashes—cold ashes?" She turned on him suddenly.

He did not know what to reply. He did not know Myra in this mood.

She looked again into the fire. "The end of everything is ashes, and so I would wish the fire never to go out. Some day our fires will be out, and we shall be ashes too. Did you ever think of that, Guy?"

He thought bitterly that his hopes were ashes already, but he strove to infuse cheerfulness into his reply.

"Isn't that rather morbid, Myra?" he said.

She turned towards him again and laid her hand on the arm of his chair. "No," she answered. "I say to myself, Make the most of the fire while it is there, for to ashes it must come at last. That's no morbid doctrine." She laughed joyously and shot a glance at him beneath her eyelids. "The fire is all alight in us both, Guy. The fire of youth and health and strength. Ought we not to make the most of the fire before it burns itself out?"

For half a moment Guy was startled. The glance, the words, the covert invitation of the outstretched arms dazed him. Almost he believed that the invitation was to him. But the thought passed. Myra was laughing again. "You see I am growing up, Guy," she remarked.

A man brought in coffee and liqueurs. Myra waited on Guy, bringing him a cigarette and lighting it for him as he sat in his chair. Then she perched herself on the arm to light her own cigarette from his. As she bent over him a sudden mad impulse to clasp her in his arms seized him. A memory—the memory of Meriel—came before him, and the impulse passed, but it left him strangely agitated.

Myra seemed to observe nothing of this emotion. She threw herself at length on the rug, resting her head on her hand, gazing into the fire. The flickering flames were reflected in the closed windows of her eyes. She rose suddenly, and without a word snapped off the electric lights and returning threw herself down again in the same attitude. She seemed oblivious of his presence. The murmur of the traffic entered through the open window, the firelight dwindled to a deep glow.

Guy began to feel as if some unknown agency were at work to deprive him of his senses. Myra's words dwelt in his mind: "The fire is alight in us both, Guy. Ought we not to make the most of the fire before it burns itself out?"

There was a murmur of voices in the hall. Guy listened. Perhaps the Commendatore had returned. A door closed sharply. There was no other sound. He realized then that the servants had gone. He was alone with Myra in the flat. It had happened hundreds of times previously, but never had he realized it before. Perhaps it was that the Myra with whom he had dined was so entirely new to him, an utterly different Myra to the sisterly being with whom he had quarrelled and petted when they lived under the same roof. Supposing Hora should not return——

Myra was looking at him. She had turned where she lay, and resting on her elbows she was gazing up at him. There was a challenge in her glance.

"Am I beautiful, Guy?" she asked.

His brain whirled. He fought against the web which seemed to be enveloping him against his will. He did not know that the languor which possessed him was largely due to reaction after the mental and physical strain he had so recently undergone. His voice was husky as he evaded the question.

"What strange devil possesses you to-night, Myra?"

"I am beautiful, am I not?" she repeated.

She had drawn herself up to his knees and knelt beside his chair.

"You have never told me I am beautiful," she whispered coaxingly. Her hair brushed his cheeks. Her lips were very near his. Without his will, it

seemed, his hand fell upon her firm white arm, and he thrilled at the touch.

"Myra, Myra, you will steal away my soul."

The cry was wrung from him.

Her eyes flashed. It was as if the fire she had spoken of had burst into a blaze.

"I have given you mine long ago," she answered. Her arms were thrown about him. "Guy, don't you know, haven't you seen how I love you?" She whispered the words tremulously, while her drooping lids half veiled the passion glowing in her eyes, and her bosom rose and fell stormily. "No one can ever love you as I love you, Guy." She thought she was secure of victory. Her lips half parted for the expected kiss. Guy had risen, holding her tightly to him. She drooped in his arms. Almost he was won. "You have stolen my love," she murmured.

What strange fate brought these particular words to her lips? Guy, thrilling in response to the passion which throbbed in her veins, his senses enthralled by the diablerie of her beauty, remembered that Meriel had used the very same words. He forgot where he was. Once again he was on the deck of the yacht becalmed and hope had passed him by with a flowing sail. Had hope come again? Myra loved him. And he had not stolen her love. His conscience was clear there. Yes, Myra loved him, and he was hungry for love. Could he give her love in return? He knew that he could not. Passion he could give, a short-

lived fire. No, no, no! A thousand times no. It would be desecration of the memory he cherished. The conflict was brief.

He gently loosened the entwining arms which held him. He could not trust himself to speak. He placed the girl gently in the chair and turned away. She sprang after him, realizing his intention. "Guy," she cried, "you cannot be so cruel." There was agony in her voice and despair in her gesture. She was carried away by the violence of her emotion. "I only ask you to love me a little." Her words were those of a child pleading. "I will be so good, so good. I only want to be near you, Guy. I won't ask you to be all mine, only that sometimes you will be kind and remember me." Her mood changed. She threw herself to her knees. "I am beautiful, Guy, I know I am beautiful. There are not many women so beautiful as I am, Guy, and——" She held up her hands pleadingly. "You won't leave me all alone—all alone for ever, Guy?"

He held her hands tightly, and as she looked into his eyes she knew that her hope was vain. Her mouth drooped at the corners. She freed her hands, and dropped, a pathetic figure of despair, on to the rug.

Guy walked to the door. But he could not leave her so. He came back and knelt beside her.

"If I believed in God, I would say, God help both of us, Myra." There was a quiver of pain in his voice.

"I too love, and my love is hopeless. I did not know, Myra."

She was listening, and now she raised herself. The passion had gone out of her face. Her eyes were dull.

"It does not matter," she said. "I have been a fool."

He paid no heed to her words, but went on steadily.

"My love is hopeless," he said. "I do not think I can ever love again, but here am I, and if you think" —he hesitated a moment—"if you think I can make you happy in any way—Myra, will you marry me? You shall have no cause to complain."

A sob shook her frame. "No," she said. "I have been a fool. It is your love I want, and now I know it cannot be mine I want to be alone." She pointed to the fire. "The flames have died away. Soon there will only be dead ashes. Help me up, Guy." He assisted her to rise. "I think I'll go to bed, Guy," she said. "Good night."

She held out one hand. He took both, and drawing her to him kissed her. She responded with a kiss passionless as a child's.

When she passed out he left the door ajar. Later on he went to the door of her room and listened. He could hear her regular breathing, and judged she slept. Yet he kept vigil until the dawn broke. Then he ventured to peep into her room. Yes, she slept with tears glistening on her eyelashes. The fear which had beset him lest she should have been tempted

to end her life was relieved. He put on his coat and hat and let himself out.

"Poor Myra," he thought pityingly.

He was developing rapidly. The previous morning he had been pitying himself.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FRIEND IN ADVERSITY

BLUE skies and sunshine and a rippling silver sea, all nature jocund and gay, and for the first time in her young life Meriel was unresponsive to the appeal. The romance had gone out of life. The man she had learned to love was a thief—a thief. She told herself fiercely that she no longer loved him, that she had never loved him, but the ache at her heart gave the lie to the declaration.

That perpetual ache at her heart! If she could only have shared the burden with Mrs. Marven, taken advantage of her aunt's sympathetic counsel, sobbed out her trouble and her despair on that motherly breast, the pain would have been easier to bear. But she could not do that. Thief though he was, Meriel could not betray Guy's confidence.

Mrs. Marven wondered at the girl's reticence. Yet she waited in patience for the confidence which was not yet given. Sooner or later she felt it would be given to her. Her husband had told her of Guy's conversation with him. She gathered that no ordinary blow had shattered her darling's romance, and though

she longed to counsel and to comfort, to mingle her tears with Meriel's, yet she did not press her for the confidence which was withheld.

Yet though the girl suffered, she strove to put her misery from her, to busy herself with trivial duties. She went to the garden, but she could not remain amongst the flowers. Her glance fell on a rose Guy had tied. Now it was battered by the storm and shapeless—like her romance. She passed through the garden, across the meadow, and on to the sea-wall. She desired to be alone, that was all. She strolled idly along, unseeing anything but the tide slowly rising over the mud, quite unconscious of the approach of an acquaintance.

Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim had recognized Meriel while yet some distance away and had hastened his footsteps. He had wondered that she was alone, but congratulated himself on the fact, for then Guy would probably be alone too. He wanted a private conference with Guy. He too had been troubled greatly in his thoughts during the previous day and night. Ever since Cornelius Jessel had revealed to him the fact that one item of his missing property was in Guy's possession he had been rejoicing in the thought that vengeance on his spoliators was soon to be within his reach. Not that he wholly trusted the valet's word. The shadow-man was not possessed of a confidence-inspiring personality, but the man had not asked for any cash on account for the informa-

tion he had furnished. Flurscheim judged that the informer must have been quite convinced as to the truth of his information, or he would not have been so confiding. Flurscheim had arranged with him to secure the miniature, so that he might identify it. After that his course would be simple. The police would do the rest. He blessed the lucky chance which had brought him to recognize the strange likeness which existed between Meriel and the missing miniature. But for that curious coincidence he might never have had the opportunity of getting on the track of his missing treasures.

Meriel had been correct in her intuition when she read another meaning in his warning to Guy to beware of the approaching storm. He could not resist the jest. But then the events which had immediately followed played havoc with his plans and projects.

Guy had saved his life. Would the man who had robbed him have done that? Hildebrand Flurscheim set great store by his life. When he felt himself falling, when the water closed over his head, a great horror possessed him. He struggled madly, blindly, against the fearful thing. Then a strong hand had gripped him. He had still struggled, until dimly he had comprehended that a cool voice was commanding him to be still, telling him that he was safe. The words repeated again and again had impressed themselves upon his consciousness. He had ceased to struggle. He had trusted entirely to the strong hand which

supported him. Then, he knew not how, other hands had lifted him up and taken him into a boat. He had opened his eyes and seen Guy clamber up over the stern; had heard him say—

"Not much the matter, eh, Mr. Flurscheim?"

The experience seemed to have lasted hours. He said little, but he had insisted when Guy was put aboard the *Witch* on shaking the young man's hand. And when afterwards the horror of those moments returned to him, there was renewed in his mind the feeling of gratitude to his preserver. He was glad that it was in his power to repay in some measure the debt of gratitude he owed. Guy had given his life. Well, he could give Guy liberty. Yet he was not altogether satisfied in his mind. He had no reason for thinking that Guy had worked single-handed, and he saw no reason why other parties should be participants in his gratitude. Yet rather than Guy should suffer, all the guilty parties should escape. Certainly the experience of being at handgrips with death had wrought a wonderful change in Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim's views, for it was with this determination in his mind that he left his yacht, intending to call at the Hall and tell him of Jessel's communication and of his determination not to act upon the information.

Not until he was a yard away and he spoke did Meriel recognize the connoisseur. A shadow of annoyance crossed her face. This man seemed to her to be

the cause, though a perfectly innocent cause, of Guy's undoing. She bowed slightly and would have passed by, but Flurscheim stood in her path.

"Pardon me, Miss Challis," he said, "can you tell me where I can find Mr. Guy Hora? I have something of importance to say to him."

There was a shade of agitation in his voice. Meriel was startled. Again the thought came to her: Did he suspect Guy? Was that the explanation of the presence of himself and his yacht at Whitsea?

She strove to answer steadily.

"Mr. Hora left for London by the first train this morning."

An exclamation of annoyance escaped Flurscheim. "It is most important that I should see him at once. Most important. Will you give me his address? I must send him a wire immediately."

The colour left her face. She trembled. She was sure now that Flurscheim knew who had robbed him of his treasures, that his anxiety was due to the fear lest the robber should escape him. How could she warn Guy? How could she refuse to supply Flurscheim with the address he asked? Even if she were to refuse, her aunt or uncle would give it. They knew of no reason why it should be kept secret.

Flurscheim saw her hesitation, and a strange suspicion germinated in his mind. "Surely she is not one of the gang," he thought.

His intent gaze increased her discomposure. His suspicions increased. He ventured a bold stroke.

"I wish to make some return for the service Mr. Hora has rendered me," he said quietly. "Facts have come to my knowledge which go to show that he is in considerable danger. If you do not trust me will you convey to him the warning?"

Again she looked at him doubtingly. "You would be his friend?" she asked amazedly.

"If Mr. Hora will allow me," he answered, and seeing that she still hesitated, he continued earnestly, "Will you not believe me, Miss Challis, when I say that I would do anything in my power to save Mr. Hora from a fate which would mean absolute ruin to him? May I go so far as to say that if you are in the slightest degree interested in his welfare, you will not waste any time in communicating to him the message I will give you."

There was a deep feeling expressed more in his tone than the words he used. Instinctively Meriel felt that he was to be trusted.

"I will give you Guy—Mr. Hora's address," she remarked. "I cannot communicate with him myself."

"Why—I thought——" he remarked, and paused.

Meriel did not pretend to misunderstand the swiftly checked exclamation. She shook her head sadly.

"I am a very unhappy girl, Mr. Flurscheim," she

said, and, despite her efforts, tears mounted to her eyes.

"There! There! There! Say no more," interrupted the connoisseur hastily. "Misunderstandings will occur between young people."

Meriel again shook her head. "Yesterday Mr. Hora told me something regarding himself which I could not have suspected; part of what he told me concerned you, Mr. Flurscheim; and—so he has gone."

"Then the miniature did not come into his possession by accident," ejaculated Flurscheim; "and all the time I was hoping that it had."

"No," said Meriel; "it was no accident." The words slipped from her. Flurscheim realized that she knew all about the robbery. He began to question her eagerly, but she would answer him nothing. Already she had been betrayed into a confidence which she regretted, and when he realized her difficulty he ceased to ask for details.

"It makes no difference in my intentions," he said. "Whether Mr. Hora was himself the burglar who stole my picture and the miniatures, or whether he was only one of the parties who handled them afterwards, would make no difference to my course of action. If he is warned immediately there will be time for him to clear out of the way. If not——" he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"But why?" asked Meriel.

Flurscheim repeated the story Jessel had told him.

"I can keep the man's mouth closed for a certain time," he said, "but sooner or later he will blab it out, and once the police get on the track——" again he shrugged his shoulders.

Meriel was more than ever amazed at the Jew's attitude. She let some of her surprise escape in speech.

"You, knowing where some of your valuables are, are willing to forego all chance of their recovery, to let the—the thief—go unpunished? You who everybody says had determined to spend the whole of the rest of your life on the recovery!"

The Jew spread out the palms of his hands in a characteristically racial gesture.

"The rest of my life," he said. "My life would have been ended yesterday but for Mr. Guy Hora. Strange as it may seem, life is very good in my eyes. I might never have known how good but for my accident. It was slipping away, and he gave it back to me. That was a debt which I must repay. Miss Challis, never yet have I failed to meet every obligation that I have incurred. Ask Christian or Jew who has ever had dealings with me if Hildebrand Flurscheim has ever failed to take up his bond when it became due."

She murmured something about the nobility of his attitude, but he would not accept any such complimentary description.

"It is just my business point of view," he remarked drily. "Suppose I put the value of the picture and miniatures at fifty thousand pounds. Personally I would give double that amount for my life, though I should very much doubt whether anybody else would give as many pence."

Laughter and tears strove for mastery in her face.

"You have greatly relieved my mind, Mr. Flurscheim," she said softly. "Though I shall never see Mr. Hora again, yet I—I could not bear to think of him in prison."

"You had better see him again, and quickly too, if you want to keep him out of it," snapped the Jew promptly in response. "It will want a woman's hand to do that, and from what I have observed, you are about the only person in the world who has half a chance of succeeding."

The direct attack, voicing the thought she had striven to suppress, brought the colour surging to her cheeks. "Don't you understand?" she cried. "He is a thief—a thief."

"He seems to be a rare plucky one, anyway," answered Flurscheim.

Meriel laughed hysterically.

"There! There! There!" said the connoisseur in his most soothing manner. "I didn't mean to hurt you, and I can see you are very much upset. Perhaps we will talk over this bad business later and see what we can manage between us."

There was so much kindness in his manner, so real a delicacy in his whole attitude, that Meriel felt more than ever inclined to confide the whole story to him. He was a man of the world. He owed Guy a debt of gratitude. She had not promised Guy to keep silence. He had never asked her, for he had realized that the request would have been an insult. There was little time to argue the matter with herself. Flurscheim was impatient to depart. She obeyed the impulse.

"Mr. Flurscheim," she said, "will you treat what I tell you as strictly confidential, and take no action without my permission?"

"I give you my word," he said gravely.

Meriel glanced round her. No living soul was in sight. They stood alone upon the sea-wall. Flurscheim noted her glance.

"There's no chance of being overheard," he remarked.

At a little distance was a stile in a rail fence which separated one meadow from another. Flurscheim pointed to it.

"Come along," he said brusquely, and there the girl made known to her companion the story of Guy's life as she had heard it from his lips.

"He is not so greatly to blame, is he, Mr. Flurscheim?" she asked eagerly, when she had finished the narration. "And yet nothing can alter the fact that he is a thief."

The Jew had listened with growing amazement. To him the story seemed the wildest, maddest romance he had ever heard. He could scarcely believe his ears. To Meriel's appeal he could only reply at first with an Hebraic invocation, uttered beneath his breath. Then he asked, "And you really think he was telling the truth?"

"If you had seen his face, you would have had no need to ask the question," she answered sorrowfully.

"It's the tallest story I've ever heard," he remarked. "But whether true or not, if we want to do anything for him, the first step is to get him out of the hands of that old scoundrel of a father, and," he added, "I am more than ever convinced that only a woman can do that. Think it over, Miss Challis; think it over." He glanced at his watch. "Now if you will give me his address I will be off. I have a number of things to do before returning to town."

She gave him the address. She responded heartily to his farewell, and as she stood watching him as he hastened along the path which led towards the quay, it seemed to her that already the burden of her trouble was lightened. She trusted Flurscheim implicitly, and yet twenty-four hours previously she would have been prepared to assert that he would have been the last person in the world of whom she would have taken counsel in her distress.

Not that her mind was at rest. She merely was relieved from anxiety as regards Guy's immediate safety. As to the future, there was no trace of a silver lining to the clouds. Guy and she had parted. Yet Flurscheim's words stuck in her brain. "Only a woman could help him." Only a woman!

CHAPTER XXIV

INSPECTOR KENLY CONTEMPLATES ACTION

EVENTS were coiling themselves swiftly, and Lynton Hora at the very centre of the coil was inert, motionless, unaware of the web which was being spun about him. Indeed, some of those various parties who were the actors in the events, the puppets who had been set in motion by Hora's initiative to spin the web for his own entwining, were unaware even that they were spinning such a web.

But Inspector Kenly knew. He guessed that there must have been some master-mind behind Guy's exploits, and once he had fixed upon Lynton Hora as the possessor of that master-mind he was a sleuth-hound on the trail. Where Hora was, Kenly was not far distant. When Hora left Westminster Mansions on the night of Guy's arrival, Kenly was at his heels. He tracked him to a railway station, back from the railway station to one of the big London hotels. He did not leave the premises until Hora had retired for the night. Then he went back to Westminster Mansions and learned of Guy's arrival there. He was very curious as to the meaning of the movements of

the two men. He could not watch them both, and though he longed to have followed the business through without assistance, the risk had become too great. He went in haste to Scotland Yard and requisitioned the assistance of a subordinate to watch the Mansions. He himself returned to the hotel. He was still more astounded next morning when Hora returned quietly to his own abode, and was totally unable to deduce anything from the fact that Guy had left the flat at daybreak. It was so mysterious that he could not rest. He went again to the Yard and asked for another man.

"I think I am on the track of the Flurscheim gang," he explained. "It's only a case of suspicion at present, and I still have the Foreign Office business in hand."

"The Yard" was sore at its failure to solve the mystery of the stolen picture, and a dozen men would have been at the inspector's command if he had so desired. He promised to explain later, saying that the necessity for placing his men was urgent, and so he managed to keep his information to himself. His instructions to his subordinates were simple and explicit. Unseen themselves, one was to follow Lynton Hora, the other was not to lose sight of Guy. If either of the two under surveillance attempted to leave the country he was to be detained. The warrant would be forthcoming if needed. Already the inspector had his information drawn out. But there

were three names in that information, and the third was that of Captain Marven.

His subordinates instructed in their duties, the detective hurried off to the Foreign Office. Ever since the Permanent Secretary had suggested asking Captain Marven for an explanation, Kenly's mind had been busy with the idea. Though he had been horror-stricken at first, the more he pondered over it the more advantageous it seemed. Though Captain Marven's name appeared in his unsworn information, he still doubted whether the King's messenger could be hand-in-glove with the Horas. If the suggested interview took place in his presence he would be able to judge by the Captain's demeanour as to whether he was in any way implicated in the despatch business. If implicated in that, there would be every reason to suspect that he must have had a hand in the Flurscheim burglary. So he sought out the Permanent Secretary, and proffered his request. It met with a ready acceptance. "Captain Marven," said the Secretary, "is next on the rota for service. If I had not employed him, the mere fact would have caused comment, as well as arousing his suspicions, and I really could not have employed him while this cloud is hanging over him."

"He will be expecting a call to town, then?" asked Inspector Kenly. "If he gets the usual notice he will be taken entirely by surprise on finding why he has been summoned."

"I will wire for him if you like," said the Permanent Secretary.

"No," said the detective; "to-morrow will do."

"Then I'll have a letter sent to him in the ordinary way," said the Permanent Secretary. "Of course you understand," he continued, "that we shall take no action in regard to the despatch business beyond dispensing with Captain Marven's services. It would be fatal to our diplomacy if the impression were to get abroad that any of our people were not absolutely trustworthy."

Inspector Kenly looked aghast. "But what if he is concerned in the other business?" he asked. "Mustn't he pay the penalty?"

"The penalty of twenty-four hours' law in which to get out of England, with some one in charge of him to see that he does not communicate with the rest of the gang," said the Permanent Secretary drily. "Exile will be punishment enough in itself."

Inspector Kenly sighed. He saw his case robbed of one of its most sensational features, and he loved to see sensational headlines to the newspaper reports of the cases in which he was engaged. He left the Foreign Office less elate than he had entered it, but, indefatigable still, he visited each of his subordinates in turn. Neither had any movement to report. Both Lynton Hora and Guy remained in his own abode. Kenly thought that he had earned a little repose. He got into a cab, drove to the railway station

and took a train to Wimbledon. He fell into a doze before the train started, and in his dreamy state he thought longingly of white sheets which were awaiting him at Woodbine Cottage. For forty-eight hours he had not closed his eyes. He felt thoroughly wearied.

He alighted at his station and stepped out briskly homewards. Then, as he turned into Melpomene Road, he saw in front of him a figure which he recognized. He was so surprised that he pinched himself to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"My friend Mr. Jessel, by Henry!" he remarked. "I wonder what he is doing down in this quarter again."

He moderated his pace, and followed Jessel until the latter, on arriving at the gate of Woodbine Cottage, lifted the latch and entered. By the time the inspector had reached the gate Cornelius had knocked at the door, and as Kenly raised the latch Mrs. Inspector Kenly appeared in answer to the summons of her late lodger. But Mrs. Kenly paid no attention to her visitor. Her glance had travelled beyond him and rested on her husband, whom she had not seen for a fortnight. She brushed the astonished Cornelius aside and darted along the little path. The shadow-man felt quite embarrassed by the warmth of the connubial greeting. He called attention to his presence by a little cough. It was successful. Kenly looked over his wife's shoulder and gave a well-feigned start of surprise.

"Blessed if it isn't our friend Mr. Jessel!" he remarked. "Whoever would have thought of seeing you here again? Anyhow, I take it very kindly your looking us up so soon. Come in, old chap, come in. You must excuse the missus and me. I'm only just back from my little holiday, you know. We don't do this sort of thing in the front garden every night."

Mr. Jessel smiled, and Mrs. Kenly opened her eyes widely. She had never known her husband to be so effusive with a lodger, new or old. But, like a wise woman, she said nothing, but, blushing a little, seconded her husband's invitation.

"If—if I had known you were expected," said Jessel, turning to Kenly, "I would have postponed my call for an hour. Perhaps you will allow me to come back a little later."

"Not at all," said Kenly heartily. "Come in and have a cup of tea with us. I'm sure the wife will be proud to give you one."

Mrs. Kenly opened her eyes wider than ever. She could very well have dispensed with her late lodger's company, but she had suddenly realized that her husband must have some hidden reason for his geniality. Had he not arrived at Jessel's very heels? Scenting a mystery, she played up to the inspector's lead, and Jessel, visibly gratified by the warmth of the greeting, no longer rejected the proffered hospitality. In a very few minutes he was seated at the detective's table doing justice to the delicacies which Mrs. Kenly pro-

duced from larder and cupboard in honour of her lord's return.

He had soon revealed the motive for his call. He wanted to know if the room he had occupied was still unlet, for, if so, he desired, having suddenly lost his situation, to return to the place where he had been so comfortable. Mrs. Kenly hardly knew what to reply. She was already in negotiation with another party. But her inclination towards so quiet and well-behaved a lodger as Mr. Jessel, strengthened by a surreptitious nod of approval from her husband, ultimately led to her declaring that she thought that the negotiations in progress might be broken off and Mr. Jessel installed in his former quarters.

Cornelius was delighted, and said so. "I should like to come in this very night," he said. "I have nowhere but an hotel to go to, and I never can sleep at an hotel."

Again in obedience to her husband's mute request Mrs. Kenly, after a decent amount of hesitation, acceded to his wishes, and when the shadow-man at last left them it was merely to fetch his baggage.

Mrs. Kenly accompanied the returned lodger to the door, and when she came back to the parlour she found that her husband had disappeared.

"Well, I do think he is not treating me quite fairly," she murmured, and unaccustomed tears rose to her eyes. But they dried rapidly as she heard a thud on the floor of the room overhead and recognized the fall

of a boot. She hastened upstairs and found her husband already half undressed.

"Whatever in the world is the matter, Joe?" she asked.

Inspector Kenly grunted. "Can't keep my eyes open any longer; not if you were to prop up the lids with steel bars, Loo," he answered.

His eyes were not so closely shut, however, that they were unable to detect the disappointment which was expressed in his wife's face. He caught her in his arms and imprinted a couple of kisses on her lips.

"I haven't had a wink of sleep for forty-eight hours," he said, "and I only wish I could do without for another forty-eight. But a nap, while I get the chance, will make another man of me. Now listen, Loo. What time did Jessel say he was coming back?"

"He said he was afraid that it would not be much before midnight," replied Mrs. Kenly.

"Give me a call at eleven-thirty, then," said Inspector Kenly, and he tumbled into bed and gave a huge sigh of relief. Then he raised his head. "If he gets back earlier, call me."

"But what makes you so interested in Mr. Jessel?" she asked, unable any longer to restrain her curiosity.

"Come here, Loo," said Kenly, and as his wife drew near he whispered, "That young man is mixed up in some way with the Flurscheim burglary. No, don't interrupt. I haven't time to tell you all about it,

and that is much more than I ought to have told you. Now you know why I was so anxious that you should get him back here."

"But suppose he doesn't come back?" said Mrs. Kenly.

"He will come back right enough," answered the detective drowsily as he laid his head again upon the pillow.

"But," said Mrs. Kenly, and then paused. Her husband's eyes had closed, his mouth was slightly open, in another few seconds an unmistakable snore made itself heard. Mrs. Kenly drew the blinds and noiselessly withdrew downstairs. She was excited, but not too excited to neglect her ordinary duties.

The hours passed slowly. When ten and eleven had gone without any sign of Jessel she began to be alarmed. Still, he had said he might not be back until midnight. At half-past eleven she aroused her husband, thoughtfully taking with her a cup of tea. He was sleeping so soundly that she was compelled to shake him before he could be aroused. She had just succeeded when the sound of a cab drawing up in the street outside the garden gate arrested her attention. Kenly heard it too and sprang out of bed.

"Keep him talking until I come down," he said.

The next minute a modest knock at the door announced Jessel's arrival, and Mrs. Kenly hurried downstairs to let him in.

"Half afraid I should have found you all in bed,"

he said as he entered. "You don't mind leaving the door open while I fetch my bags?"

By the time he had made two journeys to the cab Inspector Kenly was standing by his wife's side, and he was inviting the shadow-man to join him in a night-cap before retiring to rest.

Cornelius was agreeable. He followed his host into the tiny parlour, where Mrs. Kenly produced a bottle and glasses from the sideboard and a jug of hot water and a lemon from the kitchen.

"It's just like coming 'ome," said Jessel.

"We'll make you feel at home here, right enough," replied the inspector.

When a little later Mrs. Kenly said good-night and retired, Jessel felt so much at home indeed that he was easily persuaded to take "just one more" before following her example. He grew quite talkative, yet even under the detective's skilful guidance he could not be led to speak upon the one subject which his host was anxious to get him to talk about. Kenly was afraid to put leading questions lest he should become alarmed too early.

There was a time for all things, however, and the time came when the inspector thought it desirable that his companion should receive a shock. It arrived when Jessel, after knocking the ashes out of his pipe, remarked that he thought it was about time to turn in.

"There's one thing I want to ask you first," re-

marked the detective quietly. "Who was the old gentleman, got up like a parson, who came to visit you here?"

The shot told. Jessel grew suddenly pale, and his jaw dropped. "Old gentleman? What old gentleman?" he stammered.

Kenly did not reply immediately. He walked across the room and deliberately turned the key in the lock and placed the key in his pocket. Then, returning, he took a card from his waistcoat pocket and laid it on the table before his companion.

"You don't seem to be aware who I am, Jessel," he said pleasantly.

Mechanically Cornelius lifted up the card, and as he read his face grew longer than ever. He laid the card on the table. Kenly, noticing his shaking hand, smiled.

"Detective-Inspector Kenly from Scotland Yard," said Cornelius as if bewildered.

"That's me," declared Kenly. "And I mean to have an answer to the question I have just asked you."

Jessel's confusion was almost pitiable to witness. The mine that had been sprung upon him took his breath away. To think that he had been a tenant of a member of the detective force, sleeping under the same roof, and that the Master had come to see him there, were propositions too preposterous to be believed.

"You—you're joking," he stammered at last.

"Not the least little bit in the world, as you will find out to your cost, Mr. Jessel, if you don't answer my questions," replied Kenly readily. Then he added, "I know all about you, so I really think it will be best for you to meet me in a friendly way."

Cornelius remembered a dozen little schemes of his which had brought him in cash which would not bear the light of day, and his heart quailed. He never for a moment imagined that Kenly was merely bluffing. Still, he made an effort in his own defence.

"You—you know nothing against me," he asserted. "I—I've never done anything wrong." His tone and manner gave the lie to his assertion, and Kenly began to feel on safe ground.

"You may not think so, but I'm quite sure a magistrate will not agree with you," said Kenly with conviction. "Still, I don't suggest testing the matter if you will tell me what I want to know."

Cornelius saw no means of escape. He surrendered at discretion, and when the conference was ended the detective was in possession of the whole story of the shadow-man's connection with Guy Hora, from the moment when he had been employed by "the Master" to watch over him until that day when Guy had suddenly paid him a month's wages and bidden him depart at once.

Long after the conference was ended the detective brooded over the information which had come into

his possession. He could not understand it. Jessel was manifestly unaware of the identity of the man he called "the Master" with Lynton Hora. Nor could he suggest any reason why Guy should have so suddenly dispensed with his services. The detective did not enlighten Cornelius on the first point, nor did he suggest that the second fact might have been due to some discovery made by Guy that the casket containing the stolen miniature had been tampered with. Jessel had revealed everything, even the momentous discovery he had made—the discovery he had communicated to Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim.

Kenly tired of puzzling his brain after a while with theories. He made his way once more up to his bedroom and resumed the sleep from which he had been awakened.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

A MINUTE after Guy had peeped into her bedroom Myra awakened. Her sleep had been short, and she awoke unrefreshed. She arose mechanically, and was surprised that her maid was not there, that her bath was not ready. She looked at a clock and saw that the hour was not yet five. She lay down again upon her bed and watched the clouds chasing each other across the sky. She fell to counting them as they crossed her field of vision, bounded by the two sides of the window frame. In the first hour there were seventy-two, between six and seven twenty-one, between seven and eight only three. When the maid came at half-past eight the sky had been untarnished for a whole half-hour.

She told the girl to make the bath hot. The hot water was very comforting. She found a physical satisfaction in the caress of the warm water. As a child she had always delighted in her bath. She recalled her childish delight. Anything to keep thought at bay.

After the bath she dressed slowly. The maid was

exasperated, but Myra was quite heedless of the fact. The day was hardly begun, and there were so many hours in the day to be filled somehow with anything that would stave off thought. At eleven she ordered breakfast and sat down alone to it. The dishes went away untouched. She took a newspaper into the drawing-room, but she got no farther than the door. It was there Guy had rejected the love she had offered him. She had no feeling of shame, only she could not remain there. She went instead to Lynton Hora's study. The room awakened another thought. What would the Commendatore say? He had told her to keep Guy, and Guy had gone. She remembered Hora's unuttered threat, but she had no great fear of his anger. Still, she knew he would be angry, for Guy had offered to marry her, and she had refused the offer. It was not marriage she wanted, only to be loved, and she was compelled to refuse. But the Commendatore would blame her, for Guy had gone. Her lips drooped at the thought. Her spirit was broken.

Lynton Hora returned. She heard his step in the hall, the firm footstep followed by the shuffle of his lamed leg. But she did not attempt to move. He came straight to his own room. She did not even glance up as he entered.

"Where's Guy?" His voice was harsh.

"Gone," she replied, without lifting her eyes.

For a minute no other word was spoken. Hora

paced the room, up and down from door to window, and every time he turned to face Myra the scowl on his face deepened. Her manifest distress awakened no pity in him. He even marvelled that he had ever thought her beautiful. Her face was dull and expressionless, the lustre had gone from her hair, her figure drooped despondently. She recalled to his mind a dropsical old woman, clad in rags, with a palsied hand grasping at a bottle of gin in a dilapidated outhouse in Fancy Lane.

"When is he coming back?" he snarled again.

"Never."

Did her lips fashion the word? She had no warrant for making so definite a reply, but she knew that it was true.

Hora's anger nearly loosened a torrent of invective. But he refrained. What was the use? Myra had failed. Guy was lost to him. She was of no use to him now.

"If Guy has gone you had better take yourself off too," he said deliberately.

She did not appear to hear him, and he repeated the command with growing irritation.

He was surprised to see the tears trickle down her cheeks, and the corners of her mouth turn downwards. There had been no snivelling about Myra in the past.

"I could not help Guy going. He does not love me," she said meekly.

Hora's scorn could no longer be restrained. "Love!"

he sneered. "The world is mad on the subject, the besotted idiocy of immature brains. Because a girl would and a boy won't, a man's plans and schemes are to be wrecked. I'll be alone in future. You can take yourself off as soon as you like."

"Where am I to go?" she asked.

Hora shrugged his shoulders. "You have the whole world to choose from," he sneered. "Go where you like; your native gutter is about the only place which is really suitable, but I don't care where you go so long as you do not cross my path again."

For the first time Myra looked up. She met his glance, and so fierce an anger blazed in his eyes that a thrill of physical fear passed through her. Had she been in her normal condition the anger would have awakened an answering flame in herself. But she was broken in spirit. She shrank from meeting his anger. She rose listlessly from her chair and went out of the room. She supposed that she must obey. She had always obeyed Hora. But it was very hard to be turned out thus. Where to go? That was a difficult question to decide at a moment's notice. Perhaps the Commendatore was right, and that her proper place was the gutter. The Commendatore was usually right.

She gathered together some of her jewels and dressed herself in one of her smartest frocks. She had a vague idea that she was doing unwisely, but the bright colour attracted her. Her brain had room for only one

thought. She pinned on her hat carefully and went quietly out. She did not cast one glance backwards. The bracelet Guy had had made for her from the stones which had originally encircled the miniature was still clasped upon her arm.

Hora saw her leave, but he made no effort to check her. He had not intended to turn her from his door, and noting the frock and the hat he was quite easy in his mind. "She will return," he said to himself, and straightway began to think of Guy. If Guy was never going to return Hora foresaw that he must seek him out. He acted upon the decision at once and drove away to the "Albany." He still had belief in his own powers of persuasion. The thought of using Guy as a tool for his revenge had passed entirely out of his mind. He wanted nothing but that Guy, the son of his adoption, should come back to him.

At the "Albany" he arrived to find the newly furnished chambers in confusion. Guy himself opened the door to admit him. He did not appear surprised at the visit.

Hora inquired why Guy had answered the door himself.

"I've got rid of my man," said Guy.

"Retrenchment?" asked the Commendatore.

"Yes," said Guy.

"I don't see the necessity," said Hora.

"I do," answered Guy with gravity.

Hora had followed him into the sitting-room and

stood there expectantly. "Why?" he asked pointedly.

Guy hesitated. There was so much to explain that he did not know where to begin. Hora's next question did not make his task easier.

"Myra tells me that you have deserted us; is it true?" he asked.

"I can hardly say definitely. The answer in all probability will not rest with me," replied Guy.

He realized suddenly the whimsicality of the position in which he was momentarily placed—the position of defending himself from the charge of refusing to continue a criminal existence. The thought won a smile from his lips.

"You cannot tell me?" said Hora. "Have you considered thoroughly?" He stepped forward and laid his hand on the young man's arm. "Have you considered what such a decision would mean to me, Guy? I am getting on in years. You have always been with me. I might go far to meet your wishes, even to the extent of abandoning my profession, if I could keep you with me."

"It would not be enough." Guy's answer was stern and hard.

Hora was startled by the tone. "What more can you require?" he asked.

"What more?" said Guy bitterly. "What more?" His face flushed and he held up his hand. "Atonement," he replied, "atonement for the past."

There was accusation in Guy's tone, and Hora shrank under it, but he rallied his wits. "Why so melodramatic?" he sneered.

"Oh, I know it sounds ridiculous in your ears," he answered, "but I see no other way of regaining my own self-esteem." He turned fiercely on Hora. "Why did you bring me up differently from other boys? Why did you, day by day, week by week, and year by year, instil into my ears your lying philosophy? Why did you make your son a thief—a thief?"

All the concentrated bitterness of Guy's musings was infused into the concluding words. Hora's lips grew pale, and his hands trembled as he listened. He recognized the emotion from which Guy suffered by the memory of his own experience, when he had himself been branded in the light of day and the sight of all men. Still, he strove to meet the point of view.

"I thought you had learned to place their true value upon conventional terms," he remarked.

"I have," said Guy, more bitterly than before. "I have learned that a thief is a thief, whatever sophistry may be used to throw a glamour of romance over his actions."

"I never taught you otherwise," remarked Hora, "only that all men are thieves, only that the hypocritical many may steal under the cloak of the law and the intellectually honest few pursue their avocation in defiance of the law. Why reproach yourself for intellectual honesty?"

Guy made no reply and Hora plunged into argument. "What is theft? Merely the acquisition of the desirable by unconventional means. Is it a virtue to gratify your desires by the same process as the dull souls that are presumably dignified by the name of common humanity? If so, virtue is a mere synonym for mediocrity. I thought you knew better, Guy. I thought that you had learned that man owes his chief duty to himself, that his desires are meant to be gratified, that the most courageous way of gratifying his desires is the only way for man to attain his highest development."

He pursued the theme with animation. Guy had seated himself, leaning his head on his hand. Hora thought that his attitude was one of deep attention. When he paused for breath Guy spoke.

"It is of no use, Commendatore. I have gone over the same arguments with myself a hundred times, but I can no longer persuade myself that they are anything but sheer sophistry."

Lynton Hora shrugged his shoulders. "I don't understand why your opinions should have undergone so sudden a change."

"And yet you have known a good woman's love?" said Guy suddenly.

The remark stung. Hora's eyes flashed and his lips closed tightly for a few seconds before he trusted himself to speak.

"So that's the explanation," he said at last. "I

thought as much. A woman is responsible for every man's folly, and you, like the rest, are ready to abuse your intellect at the bidding of some muling miss, whose intelligence will never allow her to discern the ass's ears which adorn the image of the great divinity convention, which she worships in common with the majority of her feeble-minded fellows. Who is this wonder who has robbed you of the use of your brains? Am I right in guessing that she is of the family of that prince of hypocrites, Marven? I can see I am right. And for one of that brood you will cut yourself adrift from me, clothe yourself in the ready-made fustian of the dull herd! An honest woman's love! There was never an honest woman to be found amongst the Challises or Marvens——"

His anger had carried him out of himself, and, too late, Hora perceived that his virulent tongue had said too much. Guy had drawn himself up, pale with anger.

"Sir," he said, "I must ask you to leave me to myself. I cannot listen to abuse of one who is more to me than any one else in the world."

Hora strove to undo the effect of his words. "Chivalrous as ever, Guy," he remarked quietly, though, despite his intention, a sneer curled his lips at what appeared to him a ridiculous exhibition of sentimentalism.

Guy did not reply to the taunt, he continued steadily, "I must ask you to leave me; yet, before you go, I will

give you fair warning of my intentions. You have learned of the alteration in my opinions. I have told you that only by atonement shall I feel that I can regain my self-esteem. There is only one atonement I can make."

"Yes," said Hora breathlessly.

"I intend to surrender myself to justice," said Guy, "within the next forty-eight hours."

Lynton Hora was stunned. The utter madness of the idea left him bereft of the power of speech for a moment, and when the capacity returned to him he could only think of one argument.

"You are not reckoning on Meriel Challis marrying you when you have 'atoned,' as you call it?" he said.

Guy shook his head. "I have no hope," he said wearily. "Good-bye, Commendatore."

Hora made no answer. He knew that it was useless to argue with Guy any longer. The set of his lips, the angle of his jaw, the quietude with which he made the announcement were eloquent of determination.

The door closed behind him and he went out into the street as one dazed. The first, a merely momentary impulse, was to leave Guy to his own devices. But that passed. He became possessed by fear—an overpowering fear of imminent danger to himself. He judged rightly that Guy's chivalry, the chivalry which was leading him to sacrifice himself to an ideal, would equally compel him to keep silence in regard to his confederate. But Guy's silence would not protect

him if inquiries were pushed home in regard to either of the two adventures in which Guy had taken part. Lynton Hora knew that he could not escape suspicion, and suspicion once awakened, he knew that his career would come to an end. There loomed before his mind the long days of dull routine, the still longer nights behind the locked doors, the coarse food of the prison, the horrible convict dress. Furtively he looked over his shoulder, for it seemed to him that a hand was almost outstretched to grasp him.

Pooh! there was nobody taking any notice of him. The pleasant-featured, sunburnt man who passed him at the moment could have had no idea whose sleeve he had brushed. The Master crushed down his fear. Guy must be protected against himself, and there was no time to waste. A lunatic asylum? Certainly Guy was mad enough for one. But there would be many difficulties to be surmounted, and time was short. Hora's mind became active, as it always did under stress of necessity. Was there no one who could prevail upon Guy to forego his intention? no argument which would appeal to him? Stay. There was one which might succeed. Supposing Guy were to learn his real parentage?

Lynton Hora hastened his steps. He saw one chance of saving Guy from the consequences of his folly, of saving himself also, and at the same time paying his debt of hatred. Captain Marven assuredly would never allow his son to consign himself to a

gaol. Guy would be too chivalrous to smirch the fair fame of the family to which Meriel belonged. With his mind dwelling on this expedient Hora looked behind him no more. He was not aware that the man with the sunburned face kept him steadily in view until he disappeared into his own abode. He did not suspect that Detective-Inspector Kenly—for he was the man who had brushed his sleeve—waited patiently until he reappeared again and followed him discreetly until he knocked at the door of Captain Marven's town house. The inspector only saw in that fact one additional piece of evidence of Marven's guilty connection with the Horas. He saw that Hora put a package into the hands of the servant who opened the door, and he made a mental note of the fact. He guessed that the King's messenger had arrived in town in obedience to the summons which had been sent him, and he assumed that he had communicated the fact of his arrival to Hora. Still at the heels of his quarry he returned again to Westminster Mansions, and there he transferred the duty of shadowing him to one of his subordinates. The hour was two in the afternoon, and at three he was to be a fourth at the interview between Captain Marven, the Great Man, and the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office.

CHAPTER XXVI

CAPTAIN MARVEN'S SURPRISE PACKET

WHEN in response to the official summons Captain Marven returned to town, he was more perturbed than he would have cared to confess at the disastrous ending to Meriel's love affair. The intimacy of everyday life had only confirmed the favourable impression Guy had produced upon him, and he had looked forward with pleasure to welcoming him as a member of his family. But, altogether apart from the question of his own gratification, he was deeply pained that a cloud should have cast its shadow on the girl's happiness, and he be able to do nothing to dissipate it. He was in that condition of mind when trifles are apt to irritate the best-conditioned of men, and he was consequently as nearly discourteous as it was possible for him to be when Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim thrust himself into the same compartment of the railway train. As a travelling companion Flurscheim was the last person in the world he would have chosen, and he strove to ignore his presence by burying himself in a newspaper.

But Flurscheim was not accustomed to be ignored.

He took no notice of Marven's coolness, but chattered away incessantly, and at last he succeeded in capturing the Captain's attention.

"There seems to have been some trouble between the young people," he had remarked.

"Really, I cannot conceive that if there is it can be any business of yours, Mr. Flurscheim," replied Marven frigidly.

The Jew had taken no notice of the snub.

"I'm not so sure of that," he had answered. "I am not so sure but that I may not be successful in putting matters straight between them."

"What on earth are you driving at?" asked the Captain.

Flurscheim smiled. "It's not a matter I can talk about," he answered, "without the permission of others; but I've seen how interested you are in Mr. Guy Hora, and I've put my own construction on your looking a bit down in the mouth this morning. I hope you'll excuse me speaking straight what's in my mind, and if I'm mistaken I apologize for my interference. That's my impression anyway," he continued as Captain Marven did not reply, "so I thought that I would tell you that I think I know what is troubling Mr. Hora, and that I also think it is in my power to clear up the trouble. Of course I may be mistaken, but I hope I am not, for I owe your young friend a debt I can never hope fully to repay."

He spoke so earnestly that Marven's reserve and

irritation melted away, and the two men parted at the London terminus on the best of terms with each other.

But although Marven had not learned anything as to the nature of Flurscheim's intended action, he felt easier in his mind, for he realized that the Jew was very much in earnest, and he drove off to his town house to make his preparations for his anticipated journey with a far lighter heart than he had possessed when leaving Whitsea.

These preparations were soon completed, and he was sitting down to a hastily prepared luncheon when Lynton Hora had knocked at his door. Hora had not anticipated finding Captain Marven in town, but had merely called in order to ascertain with certainty where the letter he had written would find him. Then, finding that Marven was in the house, he had left the packet, with instructions that it was to be immediately delivered.

The package Hora had left was a bulky one. Marven merely glanced at it when the servant brought it to him. Not until he had finished lunch did he cut the string. When the wrapper was unfolded and he had shaken out the contents, his face paled and he gasped for breath. There seemed but little reason for his agitation: the parcel contained nothing but a child's pinafore and a letter. Yet the sight of the pinafore was quite sufficient to blur his vision and set his hands shaking. He recognized it. He knew it instantly,

without the necessity for turning to the corner, where the letters G. M. were embroidered by his wife's own hand. He sprang to his feet and rang the bell violently.

"Where is the man who brought this parcel?" he demanded directly the servant who had waited on him made her appearance. His anxiety was so great that the woman was terrified, and some minutes elapsed before he could obtain from her a connected account of Hora's call. She seemed to think she must have been in some way to blame for receiving the package. Marven succeeded ultimately in reassuring her, and sent her out hastily to see if the messenger still lingered in the neighbourhood. He followed her to the door, and was grievously disappointed when she declared that the man was nowhere to be seen. Bethinking himself of the unopened letter, he returned to the room where he had left it. The envelope was similar to many which had reached him previously on the anniversary of his child's disappearance, but when he opened it he saw that it contained much more than the three-lined typed message telling him that his child was alive. There were many sheets of note-paper covered in a bold handwriting which seemed familiar to him. His hand shook more than ever as he smoothed out the sheets and his eyes grew dim again. Was his son at last to be restored to him? He laid down the letter deliberately, and not until he had succeeded in mastering his emotion did he attempt to make himself acquainted with the contents. The

opening sentence made his heart leap with joy. The epistle opened baldly without any of the customary methods of address.

"The time has arrived when I am compelled to restore your son to you. I hope you will be proud of him. He is known to the world as Guy Hora."

Then his instinct had been right. Guy was his son. He wanted to read no more. That was quite enough. He would hasten to make himself known to his son. He rang the bell and ordered the servant to summon a cab immediately. He would send a wire to his wife informing her of the good news. He picked up the pinafore, folded it carefully, and placed it in his pocket. The letter he could read on his way to Guy's chambers. But first he would see if his correspondent revealed himself. He turned to the last page. Yes, there was a signature, "Hartley Ruthven, now known as Lynton Hora."

He remembered his brother officer and unsuccessful rival perfectly. He had thought, like all the rest of the world, that Ruthven had been dead years since. The reason for his child's disappearance ceased to be a mystery any longer. Yet why should Ruthven now desire to return to life? A sudden dread seized upon Marven as he remembered his old comrade's cold, revengeful nature, the nature which had been the real reason for his unpopularity in the regiment, instead of the possession of narrow means, to which fact Hora had always ascribed it. Perhaps this letter was only

a part of Ruthven's revenge upon the successful rival. Perhaps he had better read it to the end before starting in search of Guy. He passed through the entire gamut of the emotions before he had come to the end of the epistle.

Hora had deliberately set himself to describe Guy's history in plain matter-of-fact terms. He gave details of the manner of the kidnapping of the child and particulars concerning him which left no doubt that he was writing the truth. Then he went on to relate how from the first he had trained Guy to a criminal career. Captain Marven's heart was eaten out with rage, and he swore to himself that the sun should not set before he exacted a reckoning from his enemy.

Hora wrote of Guy's university career, and as he read Marven's heart expanded again with joy. His boy had apparently been uninjured by his earlier education. He thanked God for that. Then came two pages in which Hora related the episodes of the Flurscheim robbery and of the despoiling of himself of the despatches entrusted to him. "The latter was an unpremeditated link in my chain of revenge," wrote Hora. "Fortune does not always favour the virtuous." The paper became blank to Marven's eyes. The servant who came to announce that the cab was waiting at the door had to speak twice before she could make her master comprehend.

The cabman must wait until he had finished the letter. He read on.

"You will naturally ask why I am telling these facts now. I have two reasons. Fortune has deserted me at last. I had intended to reveal Guy's parentage when he stood in the dock so deeply stained with crime that part of the odium he incurred would necessarily fall upon you. More recently I determined that I would refrain from putting that coping-stone on the edifice of my revenge. Not out of any misplaced tenderness for you—do not think that. My reason was a purely selfish one. My adopted son had somehow endeared himself to me. I foresaw in him an ornament to my own profession. I became sentimental, and so foolish. I thought he should always remain my son. I forgot that he had your blood in his veins, and I let him fall under your influence. I forgot, too, that a girl can shatter the most complete philosophy with a glance of her eyes. The young fool has fallen in love with Meriel Challis, and the consequence is that he has got into his head a ridiculous idea that he must deliver himself up to justice in order to make amends for his legitimate despoiling of the Egyptians, Flurscheim and yourself. He is proposing to do so within the next forty-eight hours, so you may have time to prevent his voluntary martyrdom—a martyrdom he will certainly regret, judging from my own experience. Do not think, however, that I am only animated by Guy's interests. I am still keenly alive to my own safety. I have had quite enough of prison life, and am well prepared with means of escape,

though I do not desire to end my existence just yet. Of course, if you care to sacrifice your son in order that I shall not escape, that is your affair. Guy knows nothing of his parentage, though I have taken steps to inform him of it should you fail to do so. I shall not leave him entirely in your hands."

Captain Marven laid the letter down and, dropping his face in his hands, he groaned aloud. His heart was sick with anguish. His long-lost son was returned to him, but in what guise? By training, by profession, he was a thief. Guy Marven, his son, a thief! The horror of it was almost too great to be borne. It was the bitterest blow of his life, far more bitter even than the blow which had fallen when his baby boy had been stolen from him. If Lynton Hora could have watched the effect produced by his communication, even his thirst for revenge would have been satisfied. But more bitter even than the knowledge of what his son had become was the realization of the burden of duty which the revelation thrust upon him. As he realized his duty in the matter Captain Marven's face was grey with anguish. He had found his son only to lose him again—to lose him amongst the yellow-garbed denizens of the convict prison. More, it was he who must with his own hand send him to that outer darkness. God grant that his son would be a man! God grant it! That was Captain Marven's earnest prayer.

Then his wife and Meriel. What if they were to

learn of Guy's relationship? Captain Marven could only dimly conceive the effect upon them.

The servant came again to announce that the cab was awaiting him. Marven rose, but it was as a man ten years older than the one who had opened Hora's letter ten minutes before. His face was lined and his hand tremulous, but his lips were set firmly. He saw his duty plainly before him. There was only one path he could tread, even though every step on that path gave him a fresh pang. But he must see Guy first before he took that step.

He entered the cab and was driven to the Albany.

He was more master of himself by the time he arrived. He wondered what he should do if Guy should be absent from home, for the time at his command was short. Within an hour he was due at the Foreign Office.

Guy opened the door and started with amazement at sight of his visitor's face.

"Captain Marven!" he exclaimed. Then a great fear took possession of him. "Meriel?" he gasped.

Marven grasped the intention of the query.

"Meriel was all right when I left her this morning," he replied.

Guy's relief was obvious. "Are you ill? Is anything the matter?" he asked as he closed the door behind the Captain and followed him into the sitting-room.

Marven was at a loss for words. Hora's letter was

in his hand. He held it out to Guy and said huskily, "Read this."

"But——" interrupted Guy.

"No, read this," repeated Marven.

Guy took the letter. He recognized the handwriting and he wondered; his wonder gave place to amazement as he read; amazement was succeeded by horror; and when he had finished reading the paper dropped from his hands, and he turned his face away from the man who had brought it in a vain endeavour to conceal his emotion. He was hardly aware that a hand was laid on his arm until a voice tremulous with emotion said, "Guy, my son."

He disdained concealment then. He wheeled round and clutched blindly at the two hands outstretched to meet his own.

"Father, forgive! forgive!" he muttered brokenly.

CHAPTER XXVII

DUTY CALLS

ALL too swiftly speeded the minutes which were at Captain Marven's disposal. There was so much to be explained, so much to be learned, and barely an hour to explain everything. Yet short as was the time, it was broken in upon by the arrival of another visitor. For the second time that day Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim found himself thrusting his company upon persons who had little desire for it. When he knocked at the door of Guy's chambers Guy at first ignored the summons. But the knocking persisted. He was forced to open the door, if only to prevent his neighbours being disturbed, and when once the door was opened Flurscheim refused to be excluded.

"I must see you privately at once," declared the connoisseur. "My business is of the utmost importance."

Guy admitted him into the sitting-room, where the sight of Captain Marven surprised him into an exclamation.

"I must see you alone—quite alone," he insisted to Guy.

"I would rather you did not," said Guy. "I am afraid there is nothing you can say which will be news to Captain Marven."

Flurscheim looked from the young man to the elder man, and his shrewd eyes noted the emotion from which both were obviously suffering.

"It's my misfortune to have arrived at an inopportune time," he remarked. "But you shall soon be rid of my presence. I only want to rid myself of the debt I owe you for preserving my life."

Guy's face flushed. He felt exquisitely uncomfortable.

"You rate my service too highly," he said. "I did nothing which entailed any risk to myself, and——" Flurscheim interrupted, but Guy continued hastily, "and yet perhaps it is as well that you should have arrived just now while Captain Marven is here. I have a confession to make to you. I should like him to hear what I have to say, and—and when I have said it, I think you will no longer consider yourself in my debt."

The connoisseur found it difficult to believe his ears. Guy's words could only bear one meaning. He glanced at Captain Marven and saw that a light had come into his face. Marven had grasped Guy's arm, and Flurscheim heard him say, "That's right, Guy, get it over."

Guy turned to him. There was a new-born humility



in his voice and manner. "It is really your wish?" he asked.

"My wish is that my son should do his duty," replied Marven sadly.

Guy threw back his head and faced the Jew.

"Mr. Flurscheim," he said, "I am the thief who stole your picture."

Father and son were astounded at the result of the bold confession. They had expected amazement, probably immediate denunciation, but instead the Jew held up his hands deprecatingly and fussily remarked, "There, there, there. What if you did? I could very well afford the loss, couldn't I?"

Guy stared. He thought that he was not believed, that possibly Flurscheim imagined that he had taken leave of his senses.

"But it is true, Mr. Flurscheim. I—Guy Hora—stole your pictures. See, I can give you proof."

He turned to a little silver-bound casket lying on the table, and took from it the miniature which was so like Meriel. He cast one longing glance at the portrait as he handed it to the connoisseur.

"Well, what if you did steal my picture?" snapped Flurscheim. "There is no need to inform the whole world of the fact, is there?"

Guy was bewildered.

"I shall say no more about it," continued Flurscheim, "except to advise you to keep that miniature out of the sight of prying eyes, and to take the earliest

opportunity of getting rid of that d——d scoundrel of a valet of yours."

"But, Mr. Flurscheim," said Guy, "you do not seem to comprehend I——"

The situation trembled to the verge of farce. The Jew's eyes twinkled with amusement, but he grew grave as he saw Captain Marven's haggard face.

"Let me explain, Mr. Hora," he said. "A few days ago your man Jessel gave me information of this miniature being in your possession. The same afternoon, while I was planning how to punish you, I fell overboard and you saved my life. Now you tell me you were the actual robber of the picture and other little articles. Well, in return you presented me with something I value still more. Shall we call it a deal and shake hands on it?"

Guy could barely see the outstretched hand. A mist was before his eyes.

"Anyhow, I can appreciate your generosity," he said as he and the Jew grasped hands, "and perhaps if I could have restored you the articles I have stolen I might have listened. But there is another concerned. I must share the penalty he will have to pay."

"There may be a hundred concerned. I'll not trouble any of 'em if I should hurt you by doing so. Come, Mr. Hora, say it's a deal. Don't think you're accepting a favour. It's all the other way about, so you needn't let your pride stand in the way."

"Pride!" remarked Guy. "My pride has gone

before my fall." He was silent. A few hours previously he would eagerly have accepted Flurscheim's offer, but since he had read Hora's letter to Captain Marven the whole position was changed. Lynton Hora was no longer worthy of consideration. There was no tie of blood between them. Hora had deliberately deceived him, poisoned his mind, robbed him of parents and honour and love to gratify the malice in his heart. Guy could not think of sparing him. There could be no treachery where so deeply dyed a traitor was concerned.

"You'll say it's a deal?" asked Flurscheim again.

Captain Marven intervened. "Perhaps it will be best to explain the whole of the circumstances to Mr. Flurscheim," he said quietly. "I know that he will treat the family matters involved as purely confidential."

Flurscheim listened while Captain Marven deliberately laid before him the facts. "You see," he added quietly when he had finished the story, "that this matter cannot remain a secret between us. This letter must be laid before my chief."

"But that is madness," cried Flurscheim. He gesticulated wildly in his excitement. He protested, he implored, he argued that only an entirely wrong-headed sense of duty could demand such a course of action. But Marven remained inflexible, and Guy supported him in his determination.

He was still arguing when the striking of a clock

warned Marven that he must leave. Already it had been arranged that Guy was to accompany him to the Foreign Office. "I shall come too," declared the Jew. "Sir Everard Markham is an old acquaintance of mine. Perhaps he will make you listen to reason."

Neither Captain Marven nor Guy believed that he would fulfil his threat. But they did not know the pertinacity with which Flurscheim carried out every scheme to which he had once set his hand. They left him on the pavement and drove to Whitehall, but Flurscheim followed them a few minutes later. When he arrived at the Foreign Office Captain Marven had already been shown to the Permanent Secretary's room. Flurscheim demanded notepaper, and scribbling a hasty note, succeeded in persuading a messenger to deliver it to Sir Everard Markham at once. Then he sat down and awaited the result.

The note was delivered as he desired, but it remained unopened for a while. The Permanent Secretary was far too deeply immersed in the business in hand to have a single thought for anything else.

It was a distasteful task which Sir Everard Markham had undertaken to perform. Never before during his tenure of office had he been called upon to question the honesty of any of his trusted officials. That a soldier and a gentleman could be so lost to all sense of honour as to deliberately steal government secrets for purposes of private gain was almost unthinkable.

Yet the report which Detective-Inspector Kenly had made left very little room for doubt as to Captain Marven's guilt. And Marven was the last man whom he would have suspected of such infamy. The Secretary of State, too, was as much amazed as the Permanent Secretary at Kenly's report. He also knew Captain Marven personally. He had dined at his house, they belonged to the same clubs; he would have pledged his whole estate on Marven's fidelity, and yet—he trusted that the damning facts might be explained away, though he doubted that it would be possible to furnish any plausible explanation of the facts save one.

Most damning of all to both their minds was the final item of information which Inspector Kenly had brought with him shortly before the hour at which it had been arranged for the King's messenger to call. There could be only one explanation of Lynton Hora's communication with Marven within an hour or two of his reaching town. The two men must be in close communication with one another. Kenly himself no longer had any doubts as to Captain Marven's guilt. He only regretted that the exigencies of the situation were such that any one of the gang would escape his clutches. Still, there would be some satisfaction in having assisted to unmask such a scoundrel. He looked forward to the interview with keen anticipation. He had advised the course to be adopted, and with some alterations of their own both the Great

Man and the Permanent Secretary had fallen in with his views.

But the interview was not destined to take the lines suggested, for almost the first words Captain Marven had spoken when he had been ushered into the presence of his three judges had thrown the carefully discussed plans into confusion. So intent was he on performing the duty he had laid down for himself, that he observed nothing out of the way in the presence of Sir Gadsby Dimbleby and another man, a stranger to him, in the Permanent Secretary's room. He did not observe that neither the Permanent Secretary nor the Great Man had offered him a hand, nor that there was a false ring about the "How d'ye do, Marven," with which Sir Gadsby greeted him. Trivialities such as these were of no importance to the man who had before him the terrible duty of denouncing the son whom he had but just found.

Captain Marven had mapped out for himself the course to be pursued. First he must make amends for his own share in the disclosure. He had failed in his trust. He had allowed himself to fall into the trap laid for him. There was only one way in which he could make amends.

"I suppose, Sir Markham," he said, "you have sent for me in the ordinary course. I regret that some matters I have to lay before you will probably lead you to the conclusion that I am no longer fit to be entrusted with your commands. I think it well to

tell you at once, in case you are in urgent need of a messenger, so that you may communicate with the next man on the rota."

A dead silence followed his words. The Great Man looked at the Permanent Secretary, and the Permanent Secretary returned the glance. One thought was common to each of their minds. Was Marven going to confess? They suddenly became aware that the Captain had aged considerably since they last saw him, that his face was worn and lined, his eyes dull. Yet he held himself erect, and his voice was calm.

He continued, "The matter is of importance. Of course I can have no objection to the presence of Sir Gadsby, but I do not recognize this gentleman"—he indicated Kenly with a gesture—"and if he would retire——"

Kenly made no movement, and the Permanent Secretary raised his eyebrows in mute inquiry to the Great Man. Sir Gadsby coughed. Then he remarked drily, "This gentleman is Detective-Inspector Kenly, of Scotland Yard. It is my desire that he should hear why you consider yourself unfit to be trusted with your duties as a King's messenger."

Captain Marven could not fail to understand the suggestion which lay behind the Great Man's words. Still more significant was the cold tone in which the words were spoken. He was himself suspect. His summons was not in the ordinary course of events. He was to have been called to account. Well, what

did it matter? Yet though his cheek flushed and as suddenly paled, he gave no other sign of agitation. "He has a soldier's pluck, anyway," muttered Kenly to himself, as Marven replied calmly, "Certainly, if you wish it, Sir Gadsby."

Marven turned immediately to the Permanent Secretary.

"I received barely two hours ago a letter from an old brother officer of mine named Hartley Ruthven, who is now known by the name of Lynton Hora. I want you to read that letter first. Afterwards I should like to add any information which is in my possession to the disclosures it contains."

The Permanent Secretary took the letter from Marven's hand, and glanced rapidly over the first page.

"Good God!" he said. He looked up, and insensibly his tone became more kindly. "Won't you sit down, Marven?"

Captain Marven seated himself. The Permanent Secretary read another page. Then he spoke again.

"Shall I read this letter to Sir Gadsby? I am sure that if I say it is desirable that Mr. Kenly shall withdraw he will not insist upon his remaining."

"I should prefer Mr. Kenly should hear the contents," answered Marven steadily.

The Permanent Secretary read the letter aloud. When he concluded there was a silence that could be felt.

Marven broke it. "My son is waiting below to give himself up to justice." His voice quivered for a moment, then became steady again. "He is ready—even anxious to pay the penalty."

Sir Gadsby's face became purple. He turned to Kenly. "Here you, what the devil do you mean by letting this d—d scoundrel Hora go about kidnapping honest men's sons and bringing 'em up to break their father's hearts? What is the use of a detective force at all?"

Kenly nearly fell off his chair at the suddenness of the attack. He was far too amazed to defend himself. He understood the next moment that the explosion was only the ebullition of a warm heart which needed an outlet, for the next moment the Great Man had taken Captain Marven's hand, and was shaking it violently while he stuttered out, "By gad, Marven, I have to apologize to you. I've been thinking that you peeped into that despatch-box yourself. I'll never forgive myself for doubting you."

Captain Marven smiled sadly. "Though unintentionally, I betrayed my trust," he said. "If I had been more careful, my son——" he could get no further. The Great Man wiped his eyes and blew his nose violently. He knew Marven's story, knew of his sorrow and his hopes, and he could appreciate the wonderful devotion to duty which had led him to so sacrifice his son. He turned to the Permanent Secretary. "Look here, Markham, we must put our old

heads together, and get the boy out of this scrape somehow." He nodded to the detective: "You ought to be able to suggest something, Kenly."

The inspector's face was a study. He foresaw all his efforts being wasted. He set his lips doggedly.

"I am afraid you are asking me to assent in compounding a felony," he answered sourly.

"Compounding a felony be d——d!" roared the Great Man. "I'll guarantee it wouldn't be the first you've compounded."

To this totally undeserved slur the inspector was about to make a heated reply when the Permanent Secretary intervened. "Sir Gadsby often says more than he means," he remarked, adding thoughtfully, "in private life, of course."

The Great Man laughed, and said, "Yes, you must not take my last remark to you literally, Inspector."

Kenly's face cleared, but he was still loath to let the victim about whom he had wound his toils escape.

"Do you propose to let this man Lynton Hora go free, then?" he asked. "What would Mr. Flurscheim say to that?"

A totally unexpected answer came to the inquiry. The Permanent Secretary had remembered the unopened note which had been brought to him. He had torn it open, and the signature had attracted his attention.

"Suppose we ask Mr. Flurscheim?" he said. "Listen to this," he read the note aloud.

"Dear Sir Markham,—A friend of mine, from some pig-headed notion of duty, is insisting upon sending his son to prison. I want you, before you take any action in the matter, to hear what I have to say on the question.

"Very sincerely yours,

"HILDEBRAND FLURSCHEIM."

"P.S.—By the time you receive this you will, of course, understand that I am writing about Captain Marven.

"P.P.S.—I shall wait here until I see you."

The Great Man rubbed his hands together and chuckled.

"Let us have Mr. Flurscheim up," he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE FRUITS OF A CRIMINAL PHILOSOPHY

LYNTON HORA was not to be allowed to escape. That was the decision arrived at after the prolonged conference at the Foreign Office, and Detective-Inspector Kenly's mind was thereby disburdened of the fear lest all his efforts should have been wasted. He would have liked to have made certain of one prisoner there and then, but this was forbidden him. He had no belief in repentant offenders, and to him Guy appeared nothing more. Still Flurscheim refused to charge Guy. Captain Marven undertook to be responsible for his answering any charge, Sir Everard Markham added his persuasions, and Sir Gadsby Dimbleby declared that he would take it as a personal insult if Guy were arrested before the master-criminal was laid by the heels. The Great Man was far too great a man for a detective-inspector to offend, and so Guy left the Foreign Office with Captain Marven to await the summons to surrender himself when information of Hora's arrest should reach him.

The Captain was very grateful for the respite,

none the less because he had not personally urged it. For a little while his son would be with him. As yet the prison stain was not upon him. He was pathetically anxious to become acquainted with the grown child who was so soon to be torn away again. Duty may be sometimes an over-hard taskmaster, yet he faced it manfully, and could at least find some small consolation in the fact that his son faced it as manfully as himself.

Detective-Inspector Kenly saw them drive away together, and as he caught sight of the look of pleasure on the face of the King's messenger, he was not altogether sorry that he had been compelled to forego the arrest.

"It's a curious tangle," he muttered. Then he hailed a cab and gave the address of a police court. Ten minutes' interview with the magistrate was all he sought, and when he re-entered the waiting cab he had in his possession two documents—a warrant for Lynton Hora's arrest and a search warrant for the flat in Westminster Mansions.

Thus provided for all emergencies, he drove straight away to Hora's residence. There was no time to be wasted. From what he had learned during the afternoon, it was clear that Lynton Hora must be aware that at any moment his deeds might be brought to light, for Guy had been called in to the conference, and he had revealed all that had passed between himself and the man he had believed to be his father.

On arrival at Westminster Mansions Inspector Kenly stamped his foot with vexation on learning that Lynton Hora had gone out. His subordinate was absent too. If flight was in Hora's mind, the sergeant would obey the instructions and detain him. Kenly determined to make use of the absence to execute the search warrant in his possession. But he was not going to leave anything to chance. He telephoned to Scotland Yard for further assistance, and, pending its arrival, he chatted with his old friend the hall porter, and from him he learned that the other occupant of the flat had also gone out that morning and had not returned. This seemed more like preparation for flight than ever, but Myra's absence also left him a clear field for his investigations. A very few minutes elapsed before the assistance he had asked arrived. He left one of the two plain-clothes men in the hall and took the other with him upstairs. No one was aware of the nature of their business, and the two men entered the flat with the service key. Kenly did not waste time on a careful examination of the lower rooms. He went directly to the door leading to the attics where Hora's "collection" was stored. He only wanted to verify the information which Guy had given as to the whereabouts of the Greuze. He had long since provided himself with a key to the lock of the door, so that admission to the attics presented no difficulty. Guy had spoken truly. Kenly found the Greuze and the snuff-boxes stolen from Flur-

scheim's house. He saw also that there was a rich store of other articles in locked cabinets and cases, for which, no doubt, he would be able to find owners. But he did not linger to examine them. There would be plenty of time for that after Hora had been apprehended.

After he had been apprehended! Kenly did not allow himself to consider the possibility that he might escape. Yet as minutes passed by and the minutes added themselves into hours he began to be uneasy in his mind. His uneasiness became acute apprehension when as dusk was falling the subordinate to whom had been entrusted the duty of shadowing Hora returned to the Mansions alone.

A rich variety of objurgations rose to the inspector's tongue, but there was no time to be lost in uttering them. He inquired where Hora had been lost sight of. The man explained to the best of his ability. He had followed Hora to Waterloo railway station, had heard him take a return ticket to Worcester Park, had himself booked to the same destination, had taken a seat in the next compartment, had watched to see whether he alighted at any intermediate station, and on arrival at Worcester Park had discovered that the compartment in which Hora had travelled was empty.

Kenly reflected. Worcester Park was two stations further down the line than Wimbledon. What if Hora had wished to see Jessel again? He turned to

the man: "Was Hora carrying a small black bag and an overcoat on his arm?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"You idiot," muttered Kenly, then he added, "You will wait here until Hora returns or you are relieved. If he comes back you will arrest him and take him straight to Bow Street. If the girl returns, arrest her too." Then he turned to the other two men: "Go back to the Yard and have a full description of him and the girl telegraphed to every port in the kingdom. Stay though, you had better wire also particulars of the disguise in which he succeeded in eluding this dolt."

The subordinate shivered, and realized that if Hora did not return it would be advisable for him to retire from the force.

Kenly dictated a description of Hora's clerical disguise. There was yet a chance that he might get upon his track. He jumped into the first cab that passed and drove away to Waterloo. He could have wept with vexation at the thought of his prey escaping so easily through the incompetence of his subordinate. He looked at his watch. A train was timed to start for Wimbledon in two minutes. With luck he would just catch it. He lifted the trap in the roof of the hansom and shouted, "Hurry up, cabby; I have a train to catch."

Luck was apparently against him. Traffic was heavy, and the cab was caught in a block. Kenly

writhed with impatience. But a moment later the traffic block appeared to be a special dispensation of Providence. Kenly caught sight in the light of a street lamp of an old clergyman, in shabby hat and cloak, and carrying a small black bag, amongst the crowd on the side-walk. He could have shouted aloud with delight. He jumped out of the cab and tossed the driver a half-crown piece. His first impulse was to dash forward and there and then effect the arrest. He had recognized Hora, he could have sworn to the distinguishing limp. But a second thought restrained him. Though Guy's statements had been apparently full and frank, Kenly had not credited him when he had declared that he and Lynton Hora worked alone. He had thought that there must be other members of the gang, a supposition which had been fed by the information he had extracted from Jessel. Hora had worn his clerical disguise when communicating with Jessel. What more likely than that he should put it on when communicating with other tools? Kenly determined to follow him.

Soon he was glad that he had done so. Hora apparently had no intention of returning to Westminster Mansions. He boarded an omnibus which took him northwards. Kenly sat behind him while they drove through the brilliant streets of the West End. He changed the bus for another travelling westwards, the detective at his heels. Passengers came and went, but Hora remained until the end of the journey.

Kenly knew the district, and he thought that his suppositions were about to be verified when he observed the direction Hora took upon alighting. That way led to the quarter where the thieves of the metropolis had gathered and made themselves a colony when their old haunts in the centre of the City had been mowed down. He felt for his whistle, and wished that he had slipped a revolver into his pocket that morning. But he followed nevertheless, and was thankful when a couple of uniformed policemen came in sight. As he passed them he uttered a single word. The constables apparently took no notice, but when Kenly was half the length of the street distant they wheeled round and followed him steadily.

Hora pursued his way in a manner that showed that the quarter was not strange to him. The detective hunched his shoulders, pulled his cap down over his ears, and turned up his coat collar. Here he might be recognized at any moment. He did not want to alarm his quarry.

Hora turned into Fancy Lane. He was walking more quickly now. He disappeared under the archway which led to "Ma" Norton's disreputable shed. Arriving there, Kenly paused. The two policemen turned into the lane. He held up his hand and plunged into the blackness. The constables came on, and arriving at the entrance, they stood there chatting quietly. But their eyes were keenly observant, and

each had loosened the truncheon hidden beneath his tunic. They were in the enemy's country, and at any moment might be called upon to fight for their lives.

Kenly blundered on through the darkness, guided by the sound of voices, until he emerged into the yard. There his attention was attracted by a dull light filtering through dirty panes of glass. It seemed to him evidence that his objective was attained. Stealthily he made his way to the window and peeped through.

He had seen many strange tableaux during his career, but none stranger than that he now looked upon. He saw a dropsical old woman with a glass in her hand and a maudlin grin on her bloated face balancing herself with difficulty on a rickety chair. He saw Lynton Hora with a mocking smile on his face, by no means in keeping with his clerical garb, pointing to the hideous figure. He saw another man at Hora's elbow, a bullet-headed man with closely cropped red hair, with flushed face, whose eyes never wandered from the face of the fourth member of the party. Kenly recognized her too. Myra's beauty was not easily forgotten, and it peeped out from beneath the mask of horror which was drawn over her face.

Hora was speaking.

"So you have found your way back to your native slum, Myra. Do you find it congenial to your dainty spirit? I see your mother is celebrating your return. One day you will be like her." He wheeled round rapidly and glanced at the man at his elbow. "You

have found an admirer too, as well as a mother. You have lost no time."

Myra threw out her hands imploringly. "Take me away, Commendatore. Take me away!" she cried. She saw that Hora hesitated and she renewed her appeal.

"Why should I take you away?" he answered. "I offered you a husband and a home. You let them escape you. He jerked his head to the man. "Hagan here will supply you with both. Why should I interfere?" The hope died out of her face, and the fear reappeared as the man lurched forward.

"'Ear what the Master says; ee's a toff at spoutin', is the Master," he said, with an ugly leer on his face.

She shrank from his touch and looked vainly round for a way of escape. Kenly thought of a hare he had once seen as it doubled almost at his feet from two pursuing greyhounds. He placed his whistle between his lips ready.

"Stand back, Hagan," said Hora authoritatively.

The man dropped his hand, but there was a frown on his face.

"Suppose I were to take you away?" he asked.

Hope shone out in her face again.

"Ask of me anything you will," she cried. "Anything but this."

She had forgotten everything in the supreme horror of the hideous hole in which she had found herself.

That morning, when she had left Lynton Hora's

abode, she had thought she had been incapable of further suffering. She had gone out into the park and sat there hour after hour, conscious at first only of the one fact that Guy was lost to her for ever. She had told herself that she would never return to Lynton Hora's roof to face his sneers. He had always hated her. She had no doubt that he was aware all the time that Guy would never marry her, and that he had only bidden her try to win his love that she might be humiliated by its rejection. Perhaps he had lied to her about her mother and her home, merely that she might not be tempted to escape from him. The sound of the word " mother " appealed strongly to her in her dazed condition. Her mother could not be worse than Hora. She had the address. One day she had copied it down carefully. The slip of paper was still in her purse.

She had found her way thither with difficulty. Not until she had lost herself amongst the streets in the neighbourhood of Fancy Lane did she begin to regain her senses. Then the words of coarse abuse from the doors of public-houses, the shrill voices of women from open doors made her wish for flight. Darkness had fallen on the face of the town by that time and she became aware that she was nearly exhausted. Then a child had led her to Fancy Lane, and another youngster, for the gift of a sixpence, had acted as guide to her destination. Everybody in Fancy Lane knew " Ma " Norton.

The bully on his way to his favourite drinking-shop had seen her passing along the street. A flash of the stones set in the bracelet she still wore on her wrist—the bracelet Guy had given her—attracted his attention. He had changed his purpose and followed her.

Myra had known that Hora had spoken only too truly the moment she entered the den where Mrs. Norton was soaking herself to death in alcohol. The old woman had been just too tipsy to comprehend who her visitor was. Myra had soon given up the task of trying to explain. She had found a lamp, and after lighting it had shuddered with disgust at the filthy surroundings revealed by the light. She could not stop there. She had risen to leave, but found the exit blocked by the burly figure of Bully Hagan.

He had heard her attempts to make Mrs. Norton understand who she was. This was "Ma's" lady daughter. He foresaw profit in the fact. When his eyes rested on Myra's perfect figure silhouetted against the lamp she had lighted another thought entered into his brain. He did not at first disclose his thought. Myra thought he was merely intent upon plunder. When she understood, she realized how the Sabine women must have felt; she experienced the emotions of the women of a Balkan village when an Albanian regiment was let loose upon it.

For an hour Myra had kept him at bay, her faculties racked to the utmost. Then Lynton Hora had come on the scene, and she had appealed to him.

Now Hora seemed to be considering her appeal, her face brightened with hope as she gazed eagerly his face. He responded with a smile.

"It is lucky for you that I thought of coming looking for you here," he said. "Whatever you h done or left undone would not deserve such a fat that." He indicated the man at his elbow wit gesture of scorn.

"You will take me home again?" The relief so great that she could scarcely believe it.

"Yes, come along. It is getting late."

An angry growl arrested him.

"No you don't," said Hagan. The veins of bully's forehead were swollen and his fists clenche

"Get out of the way," said Hora in the tone would have used to a cur in the street, and as the did not stir he caught him by the arm and thrust aside so violently that he crashed against the oppo wall.

"Come, Myra," said Hora.

Kenly lost nothing of the scene. He saw the on the bully's face as he picked himself up. He a flash of steel in his hand. The whistle he held tween his teeth shrilled out as he left the window dashed to the door. The sound was answered other whistles, and he heard the rush of feet tow him down the passage. He reached the door, it stuck fast. The sound of the advancing feet drowned by a woman's shriek. Kenly hurled

whole weight against the door. The shriek was repeated. A second time the detective hurled himself against the door. This time the catch gave way and he blundered forward into the room.

Two figures lay prone upon the floor, a man stood over them calmly wiping the blood-stained blade of a knife on his sleeve. A dropsical old woman sat gazing with a maudlin smile on her face at the scene.

Kenly's head whirled. He stood still mechanically until panting breath behind him gave warning that assistance had arrived. Hagan coolly handed him the knife.

"I done it," he said, "I've outed 'em both." Then he held out his hands for the bracelets.

Kenly stooped to the floor and laid his finger on Myra's wrist. The pulse had ceased to beat. He laid her hand down again and bent over Lynton Hora. The Master lay perfectly still, and even while the detective bent over him a glaze spread itself over the open eyes. Kenly's quarry had escaped him.

L'ENVOI

CAPTAIN MARVEN never had cause to mourn for a son hidden behind the bars of a convict prison.

The fate which had fallen upon Lynton Hora was so full of horror that even Detective-Inspector Kenly would have been willing to admit that a greater power than that of the law he had striven to enforce had administered justice. When his chief therefore told him that he was expected to keep a discreet silence in regard to the part Guy had played in the Flurscheim robbery he could hardly squeeze out a sigh. Later he was to win his reward, when, by means of the Great Man's recommendation, he was appointed to the chief-constableship of an important borough, where his position was such that Mrs. Detective-Inspector was compelled finally, and for all time, to renounce taking in lodgers.

Mr. Hildebrand Flurscheim once again rejoiced in the possession of his Greuze. It returned to its old place on his wall, so that morning and night he could feast his eyes upon its beauties. Jessel never applied for the reward. He returned to the shadows from

which he had emerged. In fact, he felt that he could not be happy in a land where he was so well known to an important member of the detective force of the police. But Flurscheim always lamented that since the Greuze and the other valuables had been returned to him it would be impossible for him to liquidate his debt to Guy—Guy who had insisted upon even returning the miniature which bore so great a likeness to Meriel.

That miniature, however, came again into Guy's possession in the form of a wedding gift when Meriel Challis changed her name to Meriel Marven. The Jew's words had borne fruit. She found a loving duty in helping Guy to bury his past, and Captain and Mrs. Marven found a renewal of their own youth in the happiness which attended the union. As for Guy—well, he has been heard to declare that the waters of his life are full of star-dust.

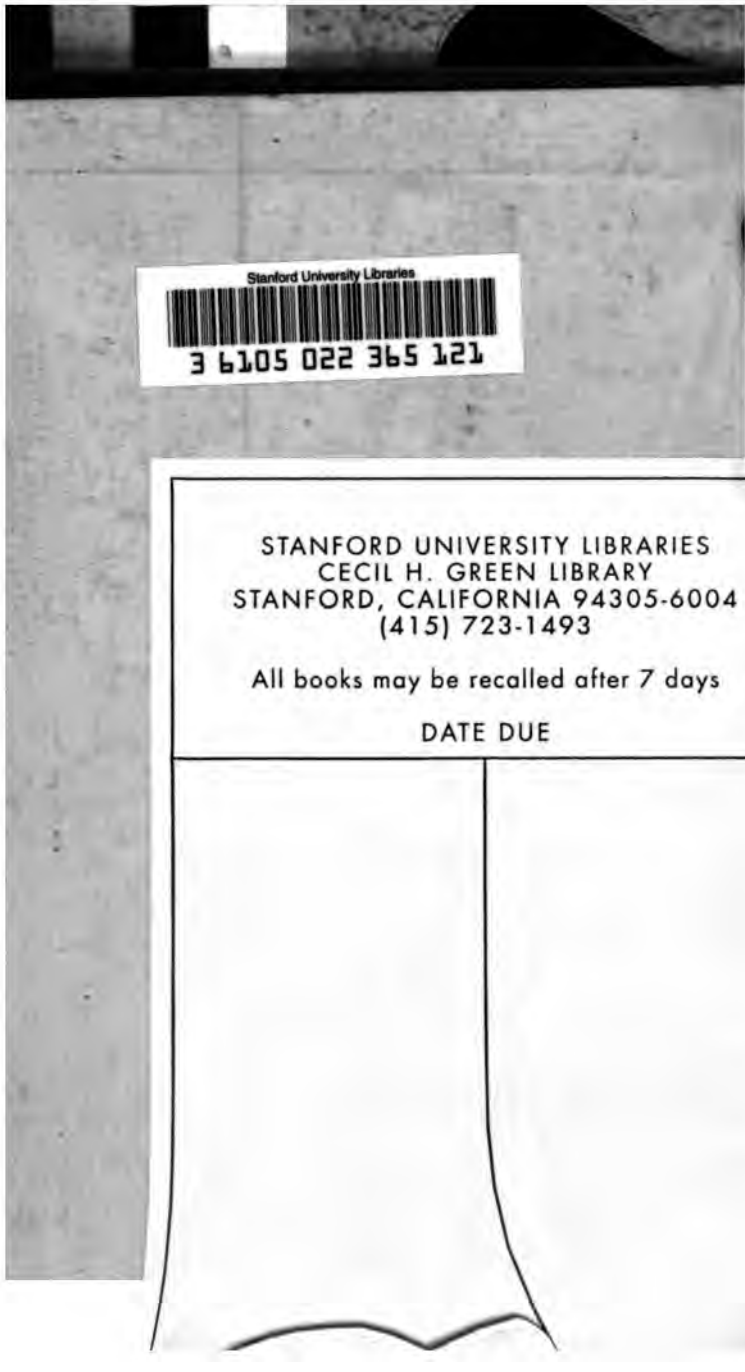


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